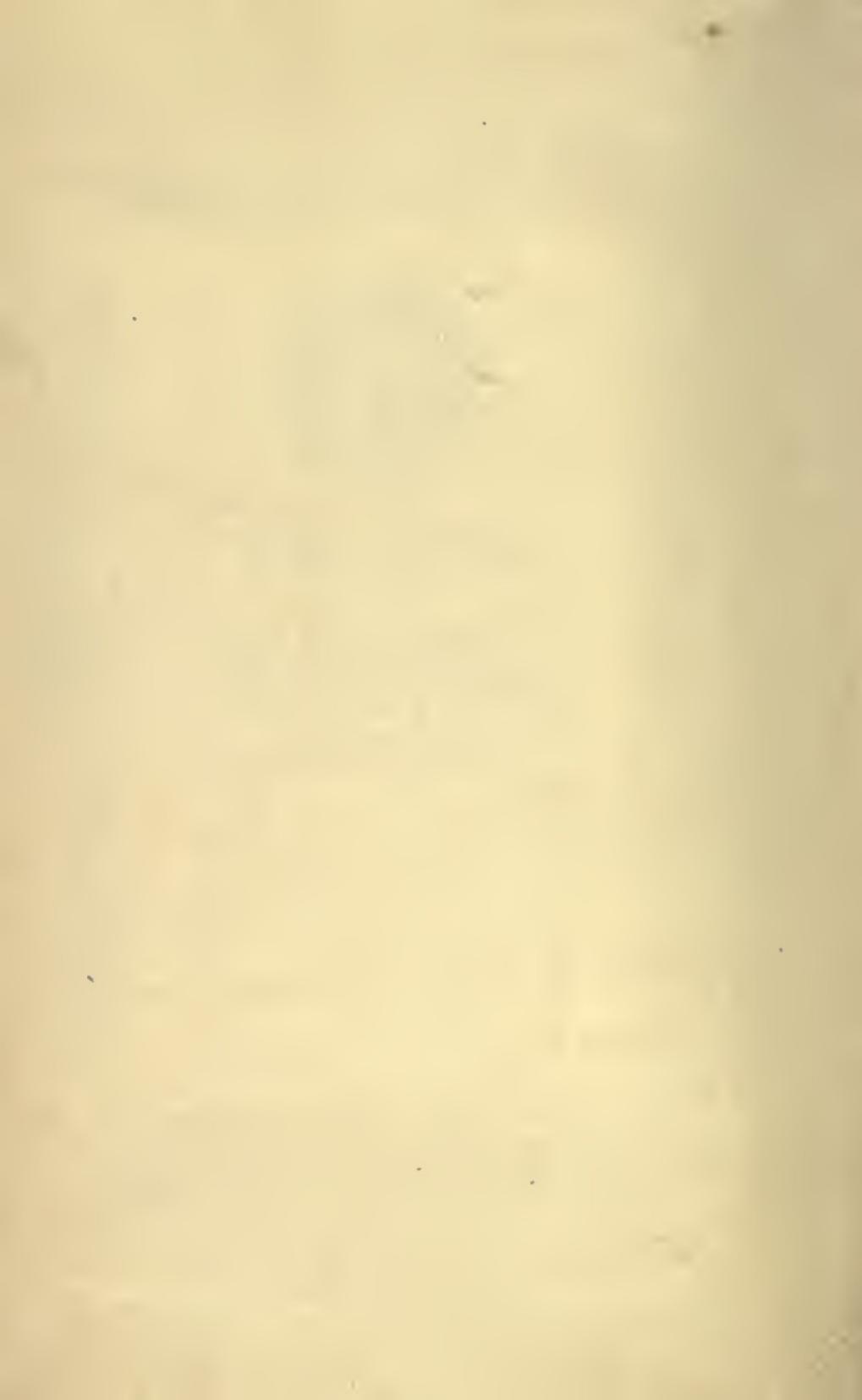


THE SQUATTER'S BAIRN

E. J. MATHER



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THE SQUATTER'S BAIRN

Extracts from Press Notices of

“Nor’ard of the Dogger,”

An earlier Work by the Author of
“The Squatter’s Bairn.”

“A narrative of surpassing interest, told in wonderfully graphic fashion.”—*Literary World*.

“Mr. E. J. Mather’s ‘Nor’ard of the Dogger’ will be a welcome volume. It is altogether an excellent account of an admirable undertaking.”—*Morning Post*.

“We can strongly recommend this very interesting volume, written by the Founder of the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen.”—*Saturday Review*.

“The story told in ‘Nor’ard of the Dogger’ reveals a phase of practical mission work that we do not believe the public will allow to languish for want of funds. No nobler mission work has been entered on in recent years than this to our hardy toilers of the sea.”—*Daily Chronicle*.

“Our readers should hasten to read Mr. Mather’s book. Its style is simple, graphic, and often touching.”—*Queen*.

“Mr. Mather has a fluent pen and a graphic style. No one can dip into this book without feeling a strong admiration for the work.”—*Guardian*.

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“A more thrilling narrative we have seldom met with. . . . In our opinion, the book of the season.”—*The Christian*.

“Most valuable and interesting. A charming volume.”—*Newcastle Daily Chronicle*.

“A book full of interest and deserving wide circulation.”—*Liverpool Courier*.

“A most interesting book.”—*Christian World*.

“Mr. Mather has written a fascinating volume, which we most heartily commend to the perusal of our readers.”—*Newcastle Daily Journal*.

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THE
SQUATTER'S BAIRN

BY

E. J. MATHER

AUTHOR OF "NOR'ARD OF THE DOGGER," ETC.

With an Introduction by the Lord Bishop of Bath & Wells
(formerly Bishop of Adelaide).

LONDON: SIMPKIN, MARSHALL,
HAMILTON, KENT & CO. LTD.
4 STATIONERS HALL COURT, E.C.

First published 1910.

Reissued in cheap form 1915.

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INTRODUCTION.

I am charmed with the story of "The Squatter's Bairn." It brings back to me many a recollection of Bush Life in Australia; and I have seen, I rejoice to say, instances of the splendid effect upon their people of the good example of worthy men among the Squatters. The whole story presents in many respects a very vivid picture of the kind of life often to be seen in some out of the way parts of the country which it was my duty and happiness to visit, and of the strange association together of men of very widely differing character, with whom one came into contact. There is a great deal of good to be learned from the book, and it will help people to understand how the main and essential principles of our Christian faith are the points which really tell for good upon the lives of the straightforward manly race to be found in Australia.

E.H. Batt. & Well:

THE PALACE,
WELLS,
SOMERSET,
May, 1915.

1521138

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

READERS of this tale will turn in vain to the map of South Australia in order to find Bannockburn, Waramba, or Eaulieu: but they will discover an ever increasing number of places where shrewd and patriotic men of the type of Alexander Grant are winning, in rich profusion, "the kindly fruits of the earth" from deep soil which was once regarded as irresponsible to culture, and everywhere the cultivator's efforts are aided and seconded by enlightened and broad-minded legislation.

I desire to record my sense of indebtedness to the South Australian Government for facilities of travel and investigation freely and liberally placed at my disposal.

E. J. M.

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CHAPTER I.

" It seems but yesterday I saw at dawn
The dim line of the soft Australian shores,
As fast we sped, borne o'er the whispering tide,
Within the grim heads of St. Vincent's gulf.
And all the sea was barr'd with purple and green
And dazzling sunlight, such as Southern climes
Know only ; while afar in distance shone
Thro' tremulous haze the scanty-scattered farms
Homed in the quiet hollow of the hills—
A land, they said, of golden air, where scents
Of sweetest flowers float, and where the grapes
In honeyed clusters droop, a paradise
Of glowing blue and tranquil loveliness."

*The 2nd Lord Tennyson, sometime Governor
of South Australia. Subsequently Governor
General of the Commonwealth.*

BANNOCKBURN.

ON a lovely evening in October, 18—, four persons lounged in deck chairs upon a broad verandah outside the dining-room at Bannockburn, the name bestowed by its owner upon the stately mansion which crowned an eminence a mile or so from the Murray, that marvellous river flowing through a land of marvellous beauty, and appropriately termed the " Nile " of Australia.

Shearing had long been over at the Bannockburn station, one of the most extensive and prosperous of South Australian estates. The annual " clip " of a hundred thousand sheep, water borne to the nearest railway terminus, had realized at Adelaide the high price which Mr. Grant's well-known fleeces always commanded ; and as the Squatter glanced through the letter just received from his agents he was gratified to notice how large a sum had been added to the funds

already standing to his credit in his bankers' hands.

Eighteen years earlier Alexander Grant had landed at Port Adelaide. His sole assets were a draft for one thousand pounds, a strong constitution, such experience as three-and-twenty years and a good education and pious training can confer, and the blessing of his dying father, an impecunious Scottish laird ; while, as a strong incentive, he was inspired by the hope of winning Lilian Woodward, only daughter of a Worcestershire squire, and sister of his greatest school chum, then a subaltern in Her Majesty's —th regiment of foot.

True native shrewdness had saved the young Scot from being engulfed in that terrible vortex which swallowed so many during the early days of the gold fever, but he had turned that very fever to his own advantage. Quick to "take occasion by the hand," he invested his modest capital in wagons and teams, obtained a concession from the Victorian authorities, and organized a transport service which prospered so greatly that, after only three years' working, he found himself not only possessed of fully thirteen thousand pounds in net earnings, but was able to dispose of his stock and concession for another ten thousand.

His early expectations being thus far exceeded, he returned to Adelaide and was able to carry out at once the plans which but for his phenomenal success might have remained in abeyance during many years of arduous toil.

After an interview with the Chief of the Lands Department, and the careful study of such maps as were then available, he spent three months in the saddle, in company with his faithful henchman Angus Ferguson.

They visited many localities before finally choosing one which, without hesitation, both pronounced not

only superior to any previously inspected, but so perfect as to soil, climate, water supply and magnificent scenery, that it would be folly to prolong the search.

Evincing wise appreciation of the vast and varied possibilities lying before the young nation then taking possession of this ancient though virgin continent, Mr Grant was not content to accept a long lease of grazing country, but immediately purchased the freehold of ten thousand well-watered acres of Government land bordering on the Murray, while leasing a tract of two hundred and fifty thousand acres as a sheep run.

With characteristic energy the young Squatter lost no time in engaging the services of an experienced manager, to whose able hands he entrusted the task of purchasing sheep, cattle and horses, and of selecting suitable and trustworthy men as station hands.

The manager's house, stores, office, and numerous outbuildings were erected some two miles back from the river, and here Mr. Grant took up temporary bachelor quarters.

During two strenuous years he laboured in laying broad and deep the foundations of future fortune. While assiduously attending late and early to the ever-increasing calls of his estate, he found time to carry out the first portion of that ambitious scheme conceived in his brain on the day when, with Angus at his side, he had first gazed upon the wide and stately sweep of the Murray reaches. Exclamations of astonishment and admiration had burst simultaneously that day from the clever Scottish gardener and his young master.

"Hech; sirs, what a gran' site for a hoose!" exclaimed Angus enthusiastically.

"Man! you're right," replied his employer, "and

it's you, my friend, shall have the task of improving the marvellous natural beauties."

"Eh, but I'll be a prood mon, sir. If ye'll gie me men an' tools an' go to some expense for young trees an' seeds, I'll mak' a paradise o' sorts oot o' what lies before oor een this day. Yon creek that rushes oot o' the gully an' across the open land might weel be checked wi' a dam, an' mak' a gran' loch quite twa or three miles lang. But indeed the hail landscape is brim fu' o' possibeelities."

"Good, Angus. I see our thoughts run in the same direction. There shall be no disfigurement of this picturesque scene by rough slab sheds or corrugated iron. Everything ugly shall be hidden away beyond that rising ground, and the wharf and necessary buildings by the river can be screened by a belt of pines. So, my bonnie Scot, make the most of the two or three years which are all I can allow you before I bring my bride to share the new home."

Then, master and man being of one mind upon many matters, they knelt together to give thanks that the long quest was over, and to offer petitions to Him of whom it is written, "except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it."



And on this beauteous evening in early summer the wealthy Squatter and Member of the Legislative Council raises his eyes from the letter and gazes fondly at his fair and still young-looking wife, and once more he thanks God not only for great and growing prosperity, but above all for the woman whose heart he had won years ago, and although incidentally she had brought a handsome dowry, it was not this, but her

tender love and wifely devotion that had been the crown of life's happiness in this glorious and fruitful land, to which he had become more attached year by year.

"Well, Aleck," broke in his sister-in-law, Mrs. Woodward, "a penny for your thoughts. Lilian and I have been planning a picnic, and of course we wanted to obtain your sanction, but you have been so engrossed in your letter and then in a deep brown study that we hesitated to interrupt you."

"My dear Barbara, as to your munificent offer for my thoughts, I was just thinking how true are the words written long ago, "he that findeth a wife findeth a good thing and obtaineth favour of the Lord," a text which both Marmaduke and I can appreciate. With regard to your suggested picnic, do you expect me to be an old curmudgeon and veto all your plans? Because, if so, you will be disappointed. I am sure your husband and I will both appreciate every arrangement made for our delight. For my part I'm ready to go anywhere and do anything which you and Lilian have discussed and approved."

"Ho, ho! hark ye! That's excellent from the lips of a dour Scot," exclaimed Major Woodward. "Why, Aleck, it seems to me I can remember a time, not very many years ago, when my old chum would have jibbed at once at any suggestion emanating from a lady."

"Ah, Marmaduke, I confess with shame that you are right; but since those days I have spent thirteen years in close companionship with your sister, one of the sweetest and wisest women God ever placed upon this earth, and if my manners are changed, the improvement must be credited to her."

As the Major was about to reply, a loud, clear

"coo-eh" sounded in the distance, then rapid hoof beats were heard in the avenue, and within three minutes a handsome dark-haired boy of twelve years, but so well developed as to look fully three years older, dashed up to the steps on a superb black colt and politely saluted the party on the verandah.

"Ah, Ralph, my boy, what do you make of him?" asked Mr. Grant, looking with evident pride at the lad who sat his horse like a centaur.

"Oh, he's splendid, father. Thanks awfully for giving him to me."

"Well, don't tire him out. You seem to have ridden him rather hard."

"I'm sorry, father, if you think so; but I had a good reason for hurrying home. I called at the office on my way back and found Jacky there. He had just reported for duty, and he was full of some wonderful yarn about a child he'd seen in a blackfellows' village, so I told Mr. Webb he'd better send him on here, as you would like to hear the story."

"Quite right, laddie. Now go and tell Mick to turn your nag into the home paddock and come along to hear Jacky's fairy tale."

"Oh, I think it's all true, father. He seemed tremendously in earnest about it. Don't let him begin till I get back;" and away went the boy in search of Mick, the head groom.

Within ten minutes he was back again with Jacky in tow. Now Jacky, it should be explained, was the elder of two black trackers in Mr. Grant's employ, and this was his first appearance after three months' furlough, which he had spent amongst his relatives to the north of the Murray, in the adjacent Colony of New South Wales. He had been on the Bannockburn

estate for some years, and was devoted to the family, especially to piccaninny Ralph, as he had been accustomed to style the heir until quite recently.

"Now, Barbara, you won't be frightened at seeing a real live native, I hope," said Mr. Grant quizzically. "Certainly not," laughed Mrs. Woodward; "I shall be immensely interested in seeing a tracker. I've read and heard so much of their wonderful exploits."

Jacky created quite a favourable impression. Both the Major and his wife declared afterwards that, ugly as he undoubtedly was, the stamp of candour and honesty about his face inspired confidence, while the staid Squatter grew enthusiastic over the loyalty and devotion which had again and again been put to the proof.

"Well, Jacky, and where have you been these three months?" asked his master.

"Been other side, mas'r. Been visit old friends above Murray."

"So? And what is this tale you have been telling? Another of your bunyip stories?"

"No, no, mas'r. No bunyip. This all quite true. Way north ob Murray was with my brudder catching wallaby, when we came upon big village of blackfellows. All there, plenty warriors, plenty gins, plenty piccanninny. We stay wid dem one two days, and see white girl piccaninny."

"What!" exclaimed his five auditors in a breath; "White?"

"Yes, mas'r, quite white. Dear little piccaninny, plenty hair, all same as bright guld. Blue eyes. Plenty pretty piccaninny."

"And did you see her parents? How many white people were there living with the tribe?"

"No white people, mas'r. Nobody white at all, only little piccaninny."

"So the rascals had stolen the child!"

"No, mas'r, dat not what happen. Very strange thing happen."

"Then go on, my good fellow. Tell your story. I won't interrupt again."

"Does mas'r remember plenty bush fires last hot time, four years ago?"

"Rather! The worst time we've known for many years."

"Well, mas'r, blackfellows say big fire burn up all country as far as lake where their village stood, but de big lake stop flames comin' furder. Den, just when fire reach lake, big white man run along, carryin' white woman, den run back, leave white woman with blackfellows. White woman quiet, no speak, all same dead. Gins spill plenty water on woman's face. Byme bye she open eyes, an' look frightened at blackfellows, so dey go 'way, leave her with gins. Well, Mas'r Grant, me 'most done. Dat same night white girl piccaninny born, an' mother die, so now mas'r know why I see little one all alone in de blackfellows' village."

"This is indeed an astonishing story, Jacky," said the Squatter, "and now just answer a few questions. Did the blackfellows bury the lady's body?"

"Yes, mas'r, dey bury her by de lake de next day."

"Was she wearing any jewellery—any ornaments?"

"She had one pretty watch, mas'r. Bewful, all gold."

"All gold? Do you mean that you could see no glass? that it was gold back and front?"

"Yes, mas'r; bewful bright gold ebrywhere, an' ong, very long chain, all bewful gold."

"Ah," interposed the Major, "it was evidently a

lady's hunter. This tale sounds true, Aleck, and it is certainly thrilling. Some painful tragedy lies behind it all."

"So it strikes me, Marmaduke, and I mean to get to the root of the matter. Now tell me, Jacky, did you come direct here? I won't insult you by asking if you could find this tribe again, for I know you could track anything but a bird or a fish—any living thing that walks the earth—but, from what you heard, were they a travelling tribe, or are they likely to be found where you left them?"

"No, mas'r, not same place. Dey were going to move the day I left, but me find dem quite easy."

"Then listen, Jacky. This is what I intend to do. You must guide me to that tribe, and we'll bring away the little girl."

"But my dear Aleck," exclaimed Mrs. Grant in alarm, "surely they would overtake you and recapture the child."

"Ah, Lilian, you don't suppose I meant to kidnap the little one? Had it been a case of theft on the part of the blacks, any means of recovery would have been justifiable, but I gather from what we have heard that these people, wild as they may be, have dealt kindly with the child, and they merit consideration. I propose to go openly and honourably to treat with them, so that while securing possession of the little white girl, I may also leave behind a thoroughly contented people. In fact I expect they will think they have by far the better of the bargain."

"Of course, dear, I knew you would compensate them handsomely," replied his wife, "but you know how treacherously these wild tribes can behave, and I shall have no peace until you are safe home again..

Besides, you really ought to have me with you. How can you possibly take charge of a little four-year-old girl during the long journey back?"

"Well, my wise wifie, there is much in what you say. How many days should we be away, Jacky?"

"If mas'r and Jacky go alone, we reach village in two weeks mebbe, but tree weeks if lady go too."

"Ah, six weeks travelling, possibly a week spent in palavering, and if we have any breakdown, either going or returning, that would mean two months in all. Barbara, it would be too hard to leave you and Marmaduke to spend your Christmas alone, while your host and hostess are playing gipsy. Though I'm sure Ralph will do his best to entertain you."

"My dear old chap," cried the Major, "if I know my excellent nephew, he's not the boy to stay contentedly at Bannockburn while such stirring adventures are afoot, and most certainly Barbara won't stay here without her husband, and the said husband is going with you, although you haven't had the grace to invite him!"

"Hurrah! uncle. I've been waiting for that," cried Ralph. "I hope you'll agree, father. It would be quite a jolly picnic if we all went together, and Aunt Barbara says you were arranging for a picnic just before I came in."

"There, Aleck," said the Major, "I think that clinches it, and if you will but acquiesce, we shall form quite a strong escort for this golden-haired piccaninny Jacky talks about. My servant, Corporal Jenkins, is, as you know, a splendid shot, and I suppose you will take a couple of your men besides your two trackers. As the blacks don't use rifles, that would give you five good marksmen at a pinch. Oh, I humbly beg your

pardon, Ralph. I should have said five *good* and one *incomparable*"

" Well, Marmaduke, I suppose you will get your own way between you, so I may as well yield graciously. But the party will have to be much larger than you indicate. The first portion of our journey will be by water, and the horses will be towed in one of the wool barges, so you see we shall require several grooms in charge of the nags. However, I'll see at once to all the details."

Leaving the verandah, the Squatter retired to his study, and, summoning Ah Fang, the Chinese butler, ordered him to despatch a groom for Mr. Webb.

Within twenty minutes the manager arrived, and by the time he left his employer, as the clock was striking nine, every item of the programme had been finally settled, and before the household assembled for prayers Mr. Grant was able to announce that the search party would start on the following Friday at daybreak. As this was Tuesday, there were two clear days in which to complete the preparations.

" I observe that you don't share the sailors' superstition as to Friday being unlucky ? " laughed the Major.

" Not I ! Indeed, Friday has always been for me a remarkably fortunate day. To begin with, I was born on a Friday—at least so I've been credibly informed ; I first located Bannockburn on a Friday, and I was, as you will remember, married on a Friday ; while Ralph, in order to maintain the sequence, entered the world just five minutes before midnight on a Friday. So I should be the very last person to regard the day with disfavour."

Meanwhile, the proposed expedition was freely debated and criticised outside the family circle.

" Phwat does the masther want wid huntin' for other folks' childer, oi'd loike ter know," said Mick, indignantly, to Angus Ferguson. " Here he'll be goin' amongst them painted haythen savvidges as'll break the blissed head av 'im wid their shillelaghs. An' not contint wid loisn' his own loife, he must be takin' the whole fambly wid him to their deaths. An' all for phwat, Angus? Answer me that, ye ould Scot."

" Mick, ma guid friend, I'll tell ye a story," said Angus. There was aince, in a steep wynd in Glasgae, a group o' wimmen haverin' in a doorway. Oot in the road a wee bairn was playin'. Doon the hill cam a lorry wi' twa great horses. The driver saw the bairn, an' shouted. The wimmen saw too, an' screamed. But the laddie didna hear, an' kenned naught o' the danger that threatened, for the driver couldna pull up his horses. Just then ane o' the wimmen, a fair young wife carryin' a bairn, pushed her babe intil the arms o' another o' the wimmen, an' darted ower the road like lightnin', pickin' up the laddie an' reachin' the ither side as the lorry thundered by. ' What for did ye do that, Jinny? ' said the wumman who'd held the babe; ' It wasna *your* bairn.' ' I ken weel it wasna my bairn,' said Jinny, ' but it was *some* mither's bairn! ' Noo, Mick, I'm thinkin' that's what oor maister has in his mind. The puir wee lassie awa amang the blacks is *some* mither's bairn."

" Ye're roight, Angus, an' its mortial sorry oi be
oi said phwat oi did. Good luck to the masther, an'
may he save the little colleen, an' kill all them murtherin'
thaves o' black nagurs!"

" Eh, Mick! Mick! Dinna ye let the maister hear
ye utter such bluid-thirsty words. The puir blacks
hae souls like oorsels, ye ken."

The next two days were spent in necessary preparations, and a wagon made several journeys between the stores, the house, and the wharf, where lay the commodious shallow-draft river steamer *Bruce*, and the barge which she was to tow. The steamer ordinarily carried a crew of five hands, but for this trip five extra men had been shipped, besides Ah Fang, Corporal Jenkins and the ladies' maids.

On the barge were twenty-four men and thirty-five horses, five of which were baggage animals. Fourteen of the men were carefully selected stock-riders, all well seasoned bushmen and good shots. Six were grooms, two were cooks, and then came the two indispensable trackers, Jacky and Billy.

In addition, it was intended to pick up a sergeant and two troopers at Wentworth, the first New South Wales town, on their journey.

" You see, Marmaduke," said Mr. Grant to his brother-in-law, " I am anxious not only to provide against all risk, either from hostile natives or possible bushrangers, but also to gain for the expedition a certain official recognition, by securing the presence of the police."

" But are we to reckon with such a contingency as an attack from buslirangers?" queried the Major. " I should have thought those gentry as extinct as the dodo."

" By no means, unfortunately. We have been singularly free hitherto in this part of the continent, but the other colonies have not seen the last of them ; and, you see, our quest will take us beyond the limits of South Australia. I most earnestly hope we may have no need to use our rifles except to supply the larder, but it would be foolish to shut our eyes to unpleasant possibilities."

"There I am entirely with you, Aleck. You are acting very prudently."

The whole staff slept on board on Thursday night, in readiness for an early start, and punctually at five o'clock on Friday morning the house-party joined the *Bruce*. Morning prayers were reverently read in the presence of all the members of the expedition, then the lashings were cast off, and the steamer forged steadily up stream with the barge in tow, a strong favourable breeze enabling some sail to be hoisted on both the vessels.

CHAPTER II.

" Now, bold bird of echoing laughter,
 Hail the waning of the light !
And grim mope-hawk, as shades deepen,
 Mark the watches of the night !
Bears, grotesque, for ever climbing,
 Shriek and groan and shriek again ;
Flying squirrels, nimble wallabies,
 Clucking 'possums join the strain."

—*Nellie S. Clerk.*

THE EXPEDITION.

ONLY those who have actually experienced it could sympathize with the intense pleasure of the two English visitors in this their first trip on the Murray. Exclamations of wonder and delight burst from their lips, as at each turn of the ever-winding course new beauties were revealed. Now a rapid transition from a narrow gorge, bordered by gigantic red gums which towered skyward as though to exclude the light, to a long wide reach of smooth water whose surface reflected the sun's rays as from burnished silver. On either side the banks sloped gently upwards to low hills crowned with eucalyptus or Australian pine, while everywhere the wattle bloomed in lavish profusion, dazzling the eye with the golden splendour of its myriad blossoms and filling the air with delicious perfume.

A quarter of an hour's steaming brought them to the end of the first reach, indeed apparently to the end of their voyage, for, viewed at a little distance, the great river seemed to vanish altogether, and become absorbed in the dense scrub lying ahead. But there was a sleight-of-hand by the steersman, the wheel

revolved rapidly, the *Bruce* answered her helm, and heigh presto ! the party found a new and fairy-like transformation confronting them. Another wide reach stretched away for a couple of miles, but this time there were no gigantic rocks above the bend, and the visitors cried simultaneously, “ *What a view !* ” as away ahead and to right and left an almost limitless expanse of virgin forest, interspersed with great open spaces brilliant with gorgeous colours of South Australian wild flowers, burst upon them.

“ Oh, what a wealth of bloom ! ” cried Mrs. Woodward. “ We have nothing in England to compare with this.”

“ No,” said Mrs. Grant, “ even our dear old Worcestershire, when the spring clothes the countryside with orchard blossom, must take a second place. Indeed, Barbara, naturalists tell us there are no fewer than eight thousand species of flowers indigenous to this country, which are quite unknown in any other part of the world.”

But it was not only the luxuriant vegetable kingdom which claimed attention. Birds of the gayest plumage sported among the trees, while here and there an acre of what appeared to be snow would resolve itself into thousands of cockatoos which flew clamourously to cover, as the *Bruce* neared them. Then, suddenly, as a wide bay opened on the further side of a low headland, a noise almost like thunder startled the whole party, and the steamer herself appeared to be passing under a dark cloud, as countless widgeon tumultuously took wing and sped away to safety, followed by more majestic but equally alarmed black swans, geese, herons and cormorants, and when, by way of speeding their flight, the skipper blew several shrill blasts on the steam

whistle, some emus on the left bank and a drove of kangaroos on the right joined the general exodus.

By ten o'clock the *Bruce* drew alongside the wharf at Wentworth, at that date a very important township, as being the central point, at the junction of the Darling and Murray, to which wool shipments were delivered for conveyance to Port Adelaide. Here, while Mr. Grant called upon his friend Captain Pearce, to obtain the loan of a sergeant and two troopers of the New South Wales police, the two ladies, with the Major and Ralph, roamed through the boulevards of the handsome main street, and watched the start of several well-horsed and well-filled coaches on the journey of two, three or five hundred miles over bush tracks.

In half an hour, Mr. Grant having obtained the assistance he desired, the voyage proceeded until one o'clock, when the steamer was brought up alongside the right bank, for the double purpose of replenishing the supply of mallee-logs for the furnaces and allowing luncheon to be taken under the shade of a group of pines.

A party of men with axes soon succeeded in felling and dividing fully three tons of mallee, and stowing the logs aboard the steamer, and orders were about to be given to cast loose the mooring ropes, when the two trackers were observed in animated confabulation with their master, whose attention they were apparently directing to some objects on the bank and also below the surface of the river.

Whatever their proposition, Mr. Grant smiled and nodded assent, whereupon the blacks hurried away towards the barge, gesticulating gleefully, and shortly returned armed with a bag net.

"Come, Marmaduke," said the Squatter, "if you

and Barbara would care to see the catching of a Murray cod, you can probably be gratified. Jacky was pointing out to me that as a number of gums have been blown down just beyond the pines, it is more than likely that hollow trunks are lying in the water. If so, they are almost certain to harbour some cod, and the fish would be a welcome addition to our dinner this evening."

The whole party gathered to watch the proceedings. First the two blacks, leaving the net on the bank, dived into the stream a dozen yards or so apart. In a few seconds they reappeared, each grinning his satisfaction, while Jacky explained, "Plenty hollow tree, soon plenty fish." He then armed himself with a long straight sapling, Billy taking charge of the net. Descending once more, Billy carefully enclosed his end of a hollow trunk in the net, while Jacky, inserting the pole at the other aperture, vigorously pushed it as far as he could reach. In an incredibly short time both men came to the surface, the grin broader if possible than before, for two splendid fish were struggling in the net. These being handed over to the cook's mate, the blacks repeated the operation unsuccessfully, but a third attempt resulted in their securing an enormous fish, which was variously estimated at from seventy to a hundred pounds in weight.

"Now you've had your first lesson," said Mr. Grant "The natives catch immense quantities of fish in the way you have seen, but there are some parts into which no bribe or persuasion would induce them to dive. I'm not referring to my own trackers, who have both learned better; but the uncivilized blacks will not enter the river near a whirlpool or eddy such as you see at that corner: they declare that bunyip or dibble

dibble lives down there. When Captain Cadell ran the first steamboat on the Murray in 1853 the blackfellows took to their heels at sight of her, and hid trembling in the bush. The poor wretches believed that the bunyip had come up from below in this monstrous form to be revenged upon them for poaching in his fishing grounds."

"Poor creatures. But is no effort being made to reclaim them?" asked Mrs. Woodward.

"Yes, good men and good women have tried, indeed are trying, to christianize them. but I'm sorry to say they have met with very slight success or encouragement. There are many whites who will deliberately tell you that the natives have no soul to be saved. For my part I certainly don't hold that view, though I can't help feeling some sympathy with those who do. But now, Barbara, to come back to the question of fish. These big fellows you've seen caught mayn't be equal to your Severn salmon, yet you'll find our Murray cod very delicious. This river would yield a bountiful supply of fish for the whole continent if only we had facilities for rapid transport, but that will all arrive in due time. The coming years will see a teeming white population, and abundance of the best foods to be found on earth: enough to meet all possible local demands and to glut the home markets."

"Judging by some of the land now before us, I fancy you're a trifle optimistic, Aleck," said the Major, "certainly there are thousands of acres near the river subject to floods, if not actually swampy, while out yonder the country, as far as we can see, is dense mallee scrub, with no water at all."

"I grant all you say, but here in South Australia, unless I have grievously misread my colleagues in parliament and the men who are building up the state,

the spirit of progress and expansion will sooner or later—or rather sooner than later—conquer all these apparent difficulties. If you revisit South Australia twenty years hence you will probably find the swamp lands reclaimed, the waterless lands irrigated, and both yielding immense crops which will speedily recoup the capital expended."

"But do you think the soil sufficiently rich?"

"My dear fellow, the soil is *grand*. Remember that we are standing here to-day the heirs of the centuries. It is a glorious virgin soil, pure leaf mould to an immense depth, simply waiting for culture. Get rid of the water in the swamps, supply it on the uplands, and the richest yield of fruits and roots will be obtained."

"By the way, uncle," interposed Ralph, in demure tones, and apparently without any reference to the discussion, "do you think you could shy a stone across the river here?"

"I haven't the slightest doubt I could but for this crippled shoulder. Why do you ask, my boy?"

"Well, uncle, I'm afraid it sounds rude, but I don't believe you could, even if your shoulder were all right."

"Ah, Ralph, you know you're safe with me, but I'll make Jenkins try the shot. I've seen him shy across the Severn quite easily. Hi! Jenkins!"

The Welsh corporal strode across and saluted, and being informed what was expected of him, stooped to pick up a stone. After looking here and there in an ever-widening circle, poor Jenkins at last stood erect and again saluting, said, "I'm sorry, sir, but there are no stones here, whateffer."

A burst of laughter from Ralph, in which his parents joined, caused the Major and his servant to look surprised, indeed rather aggrieved, but Mr. Grant

hastily explained that Ralph, hearing his remark as to the great depth of pure leaf mould, had, in an apparent digression, given a practical illustration of his words. " You see, Marmaduke, a favourite trick which our people play upon new chums is to challenge them to throw across the Murray. It looks so easy, but the absence of stones makes it impossible. Now we must get aboard."

They had not been under weigh many minutes when all were startled by the cry " Man overboard ! " It appeared that one of the crew was tugging at a long pole which had become jammed amongst the fuel logs, when it gave way unexpectedly, and he was precipitated, head over heels, into the river. Happily, he still clutched the pole, although a moment later it was violently wrenched from his hand by coming in contact with one of the floats of the paddle wheel. Recovering his hold of it, the man drifted down towards the barge and, catching a rope thrown out to him, was drawn on board little the worse for his ducking.

" Very well, my son, the cook will be glad of them," said Mr. Grant, in reply to a suggestion made in an undertone by Ralph.

The boy promptly ran to his cabin, returning a moment later with four rifles. Immediately on rounding the next bend there was the usual flight of water-fowl, and Ralph, firing the four pieces in rapid succession, brought down a goose with each of the first three shots and two with the fourth, all being picked up by boat-hooks from the barge's low deck and handed over to the cook.

" Capital ! " said Major Woodward, " I never saw better practice. I beg to move that my nephew be appointed hunter to the expedition."

"Very good," said the Squatter, "the resolution is carried unanimously."

To the Grants, the scenery through which they travelled for the first two days was perfectly familiar, while to their relatives it held the charm of absolute novelty. But indeed the spell of the great stream gripped the whole party, and compelled exclamations of pleasure, until the Major in despair declared they must coin new adjectives, for he had quite exhausted those in the dictionary.

"Why, Lilian," said he, after breakfast on the fourth morning, "you were surely joking when you sent that box of books aboard, to while away the tedium of the voyage."

"Oh dear no, I was quite in earnest, I assure you, for we find a good many people complain bitterly of what they call the 'eternal sameness' of the eucalyptus foliage, and declare they would go mad if they were compelled to look upon it day after day."

"Well, I don't share such a monstrous opinion. One might as well talk about the eternal sameness of English meadow-land, for whose vivid green one thanks God, when escaping to the country after a season in town. I confess your gum trees attract me immensely, their peculiar tint of green harmonizes so perfectly with the whole scheme of colour."

"Good," cried the Squatter, coming up at the moment, "you shall now have an opportunity of making still closer acquaintance with the trees you so admire, for our voyage is over."

As he spoke, the *Bruce* headed in for the shore, and within half an hour the baggage animals had all received their packs, and, the blacks leading, the *cortége* moved off at right-angles to the river. Following

the two trackers came the police, then the family, accompanied by the maids and Corporal Jenkins, after them the baggage, and, finally, a strong body of stockmen, looking fit and well and thoroughly in harmony with their surroundings.

Riding in this order for an hour through loose scrub, the party emerged upon open country, and here the trackers broke into a steady run, heading in the direction of a belt of trees faintly visible on the horizon.

After two hours' continuous trot, and as the mid-day heat began to tell upon both horses and riders, one of the troopers rode in to say that the blacks suggested camping under the trees ahead of them, where a stream ran through a gully, and presently, with sighs of satisfaction from the ladies, the cavalcade swept within the shade.

Deep was the disappointment, upon reaching the gully, to find only the dry bed of the stream by which Jacky had camped just three weeks before. But wasting no time in useless regrets, the Squatter gave orders for spades to be unpacked from the baggage animals, and a dozen men, working in parties of four, soon managed to dig holes sufficiently deep to drain off a considerable area and secure sufficient water to provide a pint for each person. Then, after the cook's requirements had been fully met, all the horses were watered.

"This is a trying experience for us 'new chums,' Aleck," said Mrs. Woodward, as the party reclined after luncheon under the welcome shade of a dense wattle growth, "but I suppose you are accustomed to want of water."

"My dear Barbara, I have many times been in want of water, indeed in far greater difficulty than we have

been placed in to-day ; but no, I cannot say that I have grown accustomed to it. The torture of thirst is a form of suffering to which—or so it seems to me—one can never become accustomed. But our experience to-day is trivial compared with that of many explorers, pioneers and prospectors in this continent. The police, too, in some thinly-populated districts, could tell you thrilling stories of privation. Ralph, my boy, step over to Sergeant Brain and ask if he will oblige me by coming here for a few minutes."

"Sergeant," said the Squatter, handing the officer a cigar, "Mrs. Woodward and I have been speaking of the great suffering caused by thirst ; I assure her that many members of your force could tell surprising tales. Isn't that true ? "

"Indeed it is, sir. I've had many a hard time myself in a dry season, and have known cases of terrible distress where men have reeled in their saddles and dropped to the ground utterly exhausted. I remember one occasion when a party of us had been hunting down some marauding natives who had murdered several settlers. It was far away to the north of this, in a desperately salt and stony country. We had travelled on for many hours without water, having found, as was the case to-day, nothing but dried-up beds. Towards evening we were just creeping along, our poor beasts as worn out as their riders, when suddenly a native tracker walking at my side pointed to something which had flashed across the sky at right-angles to our course. I was almost too blind to see, and too fagged to rouse myself, but the native soon woke us all up by his cries of delight, and pointing again to the sky he showed us that a number of 'bronze wings' were flying overhead, and he insisted on our course

being changed, as they were certain to take us to water, which they did, though we had to cover several more miles before reaching it."

"And what are 'bronze wings'?" asked Mrs. Woodward.

"They're the commonest of the Australian pigeons, ma'am," replied the sergeant, "and ever since that day I've had a very friendly feeling for 'em, for they certainly saved our lives. Many a time since then I've kept a sharp look-out for 'em towards evening, and have never found 'em fail in guiding to water. A chap needs to keep his eye peeled, however, for the little beggars fly like a streak of greased lightning, and keep it up for great distances. Luckily they're found almost everywhere, and many travellers have had to be thankful that they're so comomn."

"And are they good eating?"

"Why, yes, 'ma'am, they're plump and juicy, and just the thing to tempt the appetite; but on that day I've been telling you about, although we found plenty of 'em in the gully to which their flight led us, we would rather have starved than have shot 'em, for don't you see they'd saved us from a horrible death, and we felt too grateful to 'em to set to and slaughter 'em."

"Quite right. It would indeed have been returning evil for good."

At three o'clock the march was resumed, and maintained for four hours, when a halt was called for the night, near a well-filled creek. Dinner was served in the *salle-à-manger*, as Mrs. Woodward designated the largest of the three family tents, and her husband remarked, as they took their places, "This reminds me of old campaigning days, though the company was rather a larger one in the officers' mess, eh Jenkins?"

"It was, sir," responded the corporal with military brevity, as he handed his master's plate.

"At any rate, Marmaduke," interposed his wife, "you would not wish to exchange, would you?"

"My dear Barbara, that is the very last inference you may draw. On the contrary I have reason to be profoundly thankful that as we sit here to-night the meal will not be eaten to a pattering accompaniment of snipers' bullets. This, by the way, is the first time I have dined under canvas since that night four years ago when the Colonel and Barton—he's Kynnersley now, you know—helped Corporal Jenkins to carry me from the dinner-table with a bullet in my shoulder."

During the momentary sympathetic silence which followed, and while Mrs. Woodward's hand rested caressingly on that of the husband almost miraculously given back to her from the gates of the grave, a slight shuffling noise was heard, and the corporal was observed standing stiffly at attention. The Major, who knew the signs, smilingly said, "Ah Jenkins, my good fellow, I can see you've something on your mind. Out with it, man!"

"Iss, indeed, sir. I would make bold to remind you that it was this very night four years ago and this very hour. Iss indeed!"

"Why, dear me, the man's right. I had forgotten. You've a good memory, Jenkins."

"Well, indeed, sir, there's small chance of my forgetting that, whateffer," murmured the Corporal huskily, and the Major, respecting the good fellow's feelings, was about to change the subject, when his intervention was effectively dispensed with by a loud burst of laughter outside the tent, which caused him to jump from his seat and exclaim, "What on earth

is that? Is there an escaped maniac in the bush?"

As though in mocking answer, there came a second peal—"Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!" louder and nearer than before, and just then one of the troopers looked in with the enquiry, "Shall I shoot him, sir?" at which the Major cried in horrified tones, "Good heavens, no, man! Would you murder a poor wretch because he has lost his reason?" At this there was more loud laughter outside, only now the merriment was shared by the Grants, the stockmen and the police, while the two trackers rolled in convulsions, and even the Chinaman's face beamed in sympathy.

Recovering himself with difficulty Mr. Grant cried "It's really too bad of us to laugh at a new chum, my dear old chap, but your wandering lunatic is the *Dacelo gigantea* of which you and I learned at college in the natural history lectures. He is more familiarly called here 'gogobera' by the natives, and the 'settlers' clock' or 'laughing-jackass' by the whites."

The Major and his wife now joined heartily in the general amusement, and were invited to leave the table for a moment and inspect the visitor, who, sitting boldly on a neighbouring tree, displayed his eighteen inches of handsome plumage in the firelight, and with a parting laugh flew off into the darkness.

"There, you've seen another Australian wonder," said Mrs. Grant, "and anticipating the protest which is on your tongue, Barbara, I may assure you that at Bannockburn Aleck never allows them to be shot, for they are such famous snake-catchers."

After dinner Ralph tracked down Corporal Jenkins, as he sat apart absorbed in the delights of an evening pipe, and begged for the story of the shooting of "Uncle Marmaduke."

" Well, Master Ralph, I'm no good hand at story telling, but in a few words it was just this way : The Major was at dinner with the Colonel and the rest of the officers, when we all heard a ping, ping o' bullets, and knew at once that the tribesmen were at their old game o' snipin'. The tent flaps were braced up, ye see, and presently there was a big crash as a bullet struck a tray o' glasses, and while every one's head was turned to see what caused the row, suddenly the Major fell over on the table with a cry. In an instant I had my arms about him, and then the Colonel rushed up in a great taking. Well, the Colonel, Captain Brady, Captain Barton—he's known now as Colonel Kynnersley, V.C.—and myself carried your uncle to his tent, and, after a long to-do, the doctor got the bullet out, but you see we were in the enemy's country, and the weather was just awful, and what with that and his worrying about things, and afraid that the regiment would be wanting him, why it brought on a bad attack of fever. That was it, Master Ralph, and it was a good three months before the Major was out o' the wood, and able to be carried aboard ship for England, and when he got there the old squire was dead, and so he retired from the service."

" Thank you, Corporal, and good-night. By the way, my father thought you might like to smoke these cheroots. He says they will remind you of India."

" Well, good night, Master Ralph, and please thank the master for his kindness. Iss indeed."

" Uncle," said Ralph a few minutes later, " Corporal Jenkins has been telling me about your getting shot, but somehow I fancy he didn't tell me everything."

Ah, what did he omit ? "

"That's just what I don't know, but it seemed as though he kept something back."

"Then, my boy, tell me what he *did* say, and I'll try to supply the omissions." Whereupon Ralph repeated the Corporal's tale.

The Major laughed merrily. "I thought as much. There are a good many i's to be dotted and t's to be crossed in *that* version. For instance, he didn't tell you that the bullet which lodged in my shoulder had previously passed through his arm, and that, disregarding his own wound, he devoted himself to me, until by and by, as the surgeon turned to give him an order, he noticed his pallor, and the next moment the poor fellow swayed and fell fainting from loss of blood."

"No, uncle, he said nothing of that."

"Of course not. Nor did he tell you that although the doctor compelled him to turn in and rest that night, yet the very next morning he was out and about, and that he nursed me night and day until I was safely at home months later. Ah, if ever man had a really good, honest, unselfish and devoted servant, it is I. But what are you laughing about, you young scamp?"

"Only this, uncle, that your story has closed in almost the same words as the Corporal's. It seems hard to say which is the more devoted to the other—the master or the servant. If I were asked for my opinion I should say that the servant has such a good, indulgent, considerate master, that he can't do otherwise than respond to the kindness shewn him."

"You rascal, stop that raillery!"

"Indeed, uncle, I'm quite serious. Can you deny that, as a master, all those adjectives properly apply to you?"

“ Well, well, dear lad, since you are serious, I will answer seriously. I endeavour to bear in mind in my dealings with my dependents the words of St. Paul : ‘ Masters give unto your servants that which is just and equal : knowing that ye also have a Master in the heavens.’ As to Jenkins, as he is going to marry your mother’s maid and settle down at Bannockburn, I shall soon cease to be his master, but his devotion and faithfulness will be gratefully remembered as long as I live. Ah, there goes Ah Fang’s gong for prayers. I thought it was getting nearly time to turn in.”

CHAPTER III.

“ Where, proper to that region rude,
Appears the Aborigine nude,
With agile form and eye of fear,
Equipped with boomerang and spear ;
A simple race, devoid of cares,
Who herd in camps, like beasts in lairs,
Exhibiting in their outlines—
As things grow coarse at their confines—
God’s image’s remotest trace,
The selvedge of the human race.”

—*Ferguson.*

THE SEARCH.

TOWARDS evening on the sixteenth day a halt was called on the edge of a picturesque gully, at the bottom of which a tiny stream bubbled and gurgled amongst the pebbles, or, forming miniature rapids, tumbled in a fairy cascade over the huge boulders, which in some time of flood had been dislodged from the banks and fallen athwart the channel. At the foot of the waterfall upon which the travellers looked down, a large pool had formed, swarming with fish, and thence, for some three hundred yards, the water, in crystal clearness, flowed placidly over a smooth sandy bed.

Add to this that great ferns grew in semi-tropical profusion on every hand, and that luxuriant tufts of maiden-hair and exquisite mosses nestled around the pool, drenched by showers of spray from the tumbling waters above, and sparkling with myriad diamond radiances in the beams which filtered here and there through the giant gums which bordered the gully : that

gorgeous butterflies and birds of lovely plumage hovered and darted ceaselessly in the sunlight, and the reader has a feeble portrayal of the wondrous scene which tempted the hot and dusty travellers to call a halt two hours before their usual time of camping.

The ladies pleaded that the tents might be pitched within the gully, upon a stretch of green sward gently sloping from the steep wall on the southern side to the edge of the stream, but this was discountenanced by the Squatter. " You see, Barbara," said he to Mrs. Woodward, " being in Australia, you must learn that Bishop Heber's hymn doesn't express the exact facts, according to our local conditions. You have here, indeed, an instance of the truth of his line ' every prospect pleases,' but unfortunately it is not correct to say that '*only* man is vile,' for we must take into account the villainous snakes. Like ourselves, they feel the heat, and were you to go down and gather sprays of that lovely maiden-hair, you would probably make acquaintance with them."

" Oh, Aleck, is that true, or are you only teasing ? "

" Well, you shall hear Jacky's opinion," said he.

The black listened to Mr. Grant's explanation, then, without making answer, he quickly cut and trimmed a young sapling, and saying " Lady, look what Jacky do," he dropped to the bank below, and crossing the stream, made a circuit to the opposite side of the pool, where he violently poked the pole amongst the moss and maiden-hair. Instantly half-a-dozen snakes plunged into the pool and swam rapidly down stream.

" Oh, how horrible," exclaimed Mrs. Woodward, " and if I had been alone I should certainly have gone down there."

" Well, even if you had, it is by no means certain

that you would have been bitten, for the snake's first instinct is not to resent an intrusion, but to escape from the intruder. But of course there's always a risk, and it isn't wise to court it."

The black had now climbed back to where the group stood, and Mr. Grant asked if he would advise that the tents should be pitched within the gully, now that he had driven off the snakes.

"Snakes no matter, Mas'r Grant, snakes run away. but big danger down there, might all be drowned!"

"Why, what do you mean, man? In this hot dry weather? Look at that sky; there's no sign of rain."

"Dat true, Mas'r, but Jacky not tinkin' of rain. De stream in dis gully am fed from de mountains many miles to de east, and de hotter de weather, more likely hab flood when de snow melt in de big mountains."

"Ah, I see; and you really think that may happen?"

"Dis Jacky's country, Mas'r. Hab seen dat happen in dis very same gully. Tiny creek swell up in few hours, just same one big ribber, wash away plenty trees."

"Well, that vetoes our camping in the gully," said the Squatter, and he at once ordered the tents to be pitched in a small clearing surrounded on three sides by lofty gums, while from the fourth face of the camp there sloped away towards the west an undulating plain, broken here and there by patches of scrub, with a belt of she-oak in the middle distance, some four miles away, and dense unbroken forest upon the horizon.

Everyone was thankful for the cool shade, after the fierce grilling heat in which they had ridden since early morning. The two natives were busy in the gully, where Jacky presently discovered a rocky basin, free from snake-harbouring moss and fern, so the three

gentlemen revelled in a welcome bath. Promising themselves another dip before breakfast, they returned ravenously hungry, just as dinner was announced, and all did justice to the delicious fish which Billy had netted—the first they had tasted since leaving the Murray thirteen days previously.

The pleasant lullaby of the brook induced early and sound slumber, but shortly after midnight Ralph dreamed that he was at Niagara, of whose thunderous roar he had read and heard. Then suddenly waking, he found the roar was a very real and ominous one.

Three bounds took him into the open air, to find all the men gathered on the verge of the gully, looking intently downwards. There was a brilliant moon and a clear sky, and in a moment the boy realized what had happened. Jacky's story of melted snows was no mere traveller's tale, for here before their eyes lay the proof of its truth. The gully was nearly bank-full, a whirling, eddying, irresistible volume of discoloured water, running with the speed of a mill race. Hastening back, Ralph summoned his father and uncle, then awoke the ladies and suggested their coming out to witness the transformation, and in a few minutes the whole party gathered on the brink of what rather resembled a raging cauldron than the placid fern-garnished stream and pool of but a few hours ago.

It was indeed an awe-inspiring scene, a scene which must be witnessed to be believed or understood.

After gazing in silent wonder for some time, the Squatter turned to Jacky with an enquiry as to the probable duration of the flood.

"Some time last many days, Mas'r Grant; oder time few hours."

"Well, it's quite evident we must camp where we

are until it abates, however long it may last, or else abandon the quest when we are almost in sight of the goal. What a pity we didn't cross directly we arrived, and camp on the further side."

Was it? We shall see.

Half-an-hour later, on the setting of the moon, the watchers returned to their beds and remained in undisturbed slumber till morning.

Everyone's first thought on waking was to ascertain if the flood was subsiding, but as a rope, which Jacky had tied during the night so that its end just touched the surface was now immersed fully three feet, it was clear that all hope of crossing that day must be abandoned.

Breakfast over, the whole party were reclining on the smooth sward, the Squatter and his brother-in-law enjoying a smoke, when Ralph exclaimed, "I wonder what Jacky's up to, he's been gone more than an hour."

"What's that," said his father; "how do you know he's not in the camp?"

"Because I saw him slip away into the bush before breakfast was served, and I've been keeping a sharp look-out ever since. He went off there to the westward at a great pace."

Billy was summoned and questioned, but he could only confirm Ralph's statement, without throwing any light upon the object of Jacky's mysterious errand, and the Squatter seemed disposed to censure the tracker, until Ralph said, "Father, don't you think it's very likely Jacky has noticed some signs, which he's busy investigating? You know it's not his way to speak about anything till he's quite sure."

"Very likely you are right, my boy. In that case he may bring us important news when he comes back."

They chatted for another half-hour. Then, the pipes being out, sleep overcame the two gentlemen, while Ralph, strenuously fighting against the desire to follow their example, sat up alert and vigilant, his eyes resting upon the distant spot where Jacky had disappeared into the bush. Presently his watchfulness was rewarded, and seeing the tracker emerge from the trees and come towards the camp at the rapid pace which the natives can maintain for hours without fatigue, he rose, and stepping cautiously past the sleepers, hastened to meet him. While still some distance away, it was possible to see that the black's face wore a satisfied smile, so the boy was prepared for good news, though hardly so good as burst rapidly from Jacky's lips, in his crisp, jerky sentences : " Me found village, Mas'r Ralph. Journey 'most over. Blackfellows only three or four mile ober dere," indicating with his finger the direction from which he had come.

" Oh, that's lovely news. I saw you slip away, and thought you'd got some great idea in your head. What made you go ? "

Standing by Ralph's side, the tracker shot out his arm, and pointing to a break in the trees, simply uttered the one word " That ! "

The boy looked in the direction indicated, but, at first could detect nothing. Yet, eager to perfect himself in woodcraft, and assured that the black would not bid him look if there were nothing to be seen, he shaded his eyes and again gazed for some moments, without result.

The disappointment on his face caused the tracker to say, " Shall I tell Mas'r Ralph ? " But the boy had been taught by his tutor to despise cribs, and puzzle out his lessons for himself, and so he resolutely refused

the black's offer. This twelve-year-old Australian was, as the reader already knows, a crack shot, and it flashed upon him that were he aiming at a distant bird he would certainly stand fairly and squarely behind the sight of his rifle. At once he realized his mistake. The object to be seen was evidently very small and far distant, and he had been standing at Jacky's side. Instantly moving behind him, he looked intently over the tracker's shoulder, along the still extended arm and index finger, and in a few seconds exclaimed, "I see it, it's smoke!"

"Yes, Mas'r Ralph, dat smoke, and it smoke of blackfellows' village. Dat de tribe we's lookin' for, an' dey hab de white piccaninny Mas'r Grant want buy from dem."

"Oh, do you really think so?"

Jacky looked at his questioner quite seriously as he replied, "Mas'r Ralph know dis tracker nebber tell him lie. Me no *tink*, me quite sure, for me see white piccaninny playing wid little black piccaninnies."

Ralph suitably apologised, then executing a dance, he called the black to follow, and darted away to share the great news with his elders.

By the time he had covered the intervening space his shouts had effectually awakened the sleepers, and the ladies, too, were brought from their tent by the general disturbance, for the news had been caught up and spread through the camp, causing the liveliest satisfaction to every member of the expedition.

"And do you mean to say," enquired the Squatter, "that their village is actually on this side of the gully?"

"That so, Mas'r. Blackfellows hab shifted quite fifty mile from where I saw dem before."

"Well, it is most remarkable. Last night I was

lamenting that we hadn't crossed the gully and camped on the further side. Had we done so we should have been cut off from our goal. We have daily sought the Divine blessing on our quest, and truly in this instance we can be very thankful that our movements have been overruled. Now, Jacky, what do you propose ? "

" Me tink it best if Mas'r let me go back to black-fellow's village an' talk to dem. Dey might be frightened away if big lot white folk went. Me see what dey tink an' come back to Mas'r Grant plenty quick."

" Very well, my lad, so do. You will of course assure them of our goodwill, and make them understand that I am ready to give them large presents in exchange for the white child. Now, as I want you back quickly, take one of the horses."

The tracker looked so reproachfully at his master, that the latter burst into loud laughter, and, patting Jacky on the shoulder, said, " I'm really very sorry to have hurt your feelings, I quite forgot for the moment that I wasn't speaking to a white man. Just do as you like, only be quick."

The words were barely uttered ere the black sped away like the wind, and, watching through their glasses, the party saw him vanish in an incredibly short time within the shelter of the belt of trees. As he disappeared, the Squatter laughed again, saying, " I think that was a record. The insulting suggestion I thoughtlessly made put him on his mettle. Now we must wait patiently until he makes his report."

An hour later a figure was seen to leave the distant wood, instantly followed by three others, and all four came on at a swift run, in single file, towards the camp.

" I think that is a good sign, Marmaduke," said the Squatter. " They are evidently open to parley, eh ? "

"Clearly. He would have returned alone if they had declined to treat."

When Jacky arrived with the three strangers, the family were standing together in front of the tents, while the other members of the expedition formed a crescent-shaped group within earshot.

The new comers appeared to be much impressed by the strength of the white party. They had seen but few white folks, and those not always of the most admirable type. Jacky presented them in due form as three chief head-men among their tribe, and told his master that he had explained very fully what was required. Although they were strongly opposed to yielding up the white girl piccaninny, as they regarded her as a mascotte who brought them luck, they were open to trade, and the more so because they had lately been pestered and bullied by another tribe with whom were some 'bad white fellows,' and who had threatened to take away their little treasure by force and wipe out the whole tribe. Indeed, it was owing to this menace that they had shifted their village. So, to sum up, as it was apparently a case of being unable to retain possession, they would rather part with their little white Beauty in exchange for tangible benefits, than lose her with no corresponding gain, indeed probably lose their own lives into the bargain.

After this preliminary explanation by the tracker, Mr. Grant, through him, addressed the ambassadors. Two of them were men of some five feet six inches, while the leader of the trio, a robust powerful savage, reached the exceptional height of slightly over six feet, and when smiling and showing his superb white teeth he was actually a handsome fellow, a descripton which cannot be applied to many Australian aborigines.

All three carried spears, waddies and decorated shields, but like all the natives, with the exception of a few in the extreme north, they were ignorant of archery, the bow and arrow so common amongst savages the world over being unknown to this depraved race: and yet they had produced, and could use with amazing dexterity, the ingeniously devised boomerang.

It soon became evident that the blacks were still impaled upon the horns of their dilemma, for while evidently in terror of their enemies, backed as they were by the "bad white fellows," they were yet most reluctant to part with the child, even in face of the dazzling offers made by the Squatter. In the result the leader made an animated speech, pointing in the direction of his village, and Jacky explained that this was an invitation to the white party to move their bivouac to a spot upon a rising ground within four hundred yards of the native huts and about the same distance as at present from the gully. Once there, it would be easier to conduct negotiations, as all the warriors must, in accordance with custom, have their say in the matter.

Mr. Grant pressed the tracker for his own opinion upon this proposal, as he feared the well-known thieving propensities of the natives, and had no fancy for laying his camp open to invasion by a swarm of dirty savages. But Jacky reassured him by explaining that the palaver would take place upon neutral ground, between the camp and the blackfellows' village. So it was agreed that immediately after luncheon the whole party would migrate to the new site, and the three warriors took their leave, laden with gifts, and evidently greatly pleased with their reception.

The new ground being found more attractive and

more convenient than the place they had vacated, no time was lost in pitching their tents, and as the Squatter was determined to omit no precautions, four sentries were stationed at points commanding the approaches.

At three o'clock the two trackers were dispatched to the village to announce that the white folks had arrived, and were ready to meet the black warriors in conference, and they speedily reported that the blacks had moved out to the agreed position, bringing the white girl piccaninny with them.

There was an exclamation of pleased surprise from the two ladies when they caught sight of the child. Even amongst other white children her beauty would have elicited wonder and admiration, but standing as she did in front of a score of naked black piccaninnies, with row upon row of dusky gins behind, while some two hundred warriors flanked the group on either side, a more striking contrast could not have been conceived than was presented by the lovely golden-haired blue-eyed English girl against the background of aborigines, the most degraded type on earth. The Australian native is in terror of the bunyip, or devil, but his intellect cannot grasp the idea of a Divine Person, the God of love ; such a Being is incomprehensible to these poor creatures. Had it been otherwise, they would probably have deified the white child, and treated her as an object altogether sacred and to be worshipped. But it was obvious that such loveliness had affected them very deeply, and compelled from their simple minds the rendering of homage, as to an exalted personage.

At Mrs. Grant's request, the little girl was brought over to them, in charge of the three messengers with whom they had conversed in the morning, the men

treating her with obsequious deference, the more remarkable by reason of the supreme contempt in which the native gin is held by her lord and master.

Whatever the dirty personal habits and appearance of the savages by whom she was surrounded, not the most fastidious critic could have found fault with their treatment of this wondrous child of another race, so tragically settled amongst them. The little English girl, decidedly tall for her age, was as spotlessly clean as if, attended by her nurse, she had been brought down for dessert in the dining-room of an English home. Of course, in the matter of clothing there was much to be desired, but as Mrs. Grant and Mrs. Woodward kissed the sweet child, and the former threw about her shoulders a valuable Indian shawl and clasped it with a gold brooch, they noticed that a lady's gold chain was twined around her neck, with the watch depending locketwise under the chin.

There was a natural grace of movement and an air of conscious dignity about the fair young creature, possibly owing in part to the position of eminence to which her black protectors had elevated her. So that while by her pleased acceptance of the shawl and brooch she evinced all a child's delight in pretty and becoming articles of dress, there was at the same time a certain manner which said, as plainly as in words, "Yes, it is beautiful, and I am gratified, but it is of course my due!"

But there was another point impressed upon all the onlookers, white and native alike. Though unable to comprehend one of all the kind words and endearing terms used by the two ladies, the child evidently realized instinctively that she was of their race, and that they were in every respect superior to the miserable

beings with whom her young life had been passed. And her partiality soon found expression. As with much vivacious pantomime she was exhibiting to her new friends the various native ornaments with which she was adorned, a sudden fling caused one of her bangles to fly through the air some twenty feet, and Ralph having raced to secure it, and with raised hat and a respectful bow restored it to the owner, she instantly, with the air of a princess and a gracious smile, handed the bangle back for his acceptance, amid general applause from the white party.

Meanwhile, the natives massed in the rear showed signs of restlessness, and this little episode caused the chief of the three head men to make some remark to Jacky, enforced by a vigorous gesture. Mr. Grant was at once informed that the natives did not approve of any further intercourse between their white piccaninny and the visitors. They had not yet agreed upon the terms of barter, and were apprehensive lest the whites, with the aid of their "thunder and lightning" should take forcible possession of her.

Mr. Grant strongly protested against the suspicion, and insisted that the three head men should immediately take the child back to their village, and then return to settle the purchase. The little lady, however, was strongly averse to this arrangement, and, clinging to Ralph's arm, declared her intention of remaining. Matters were indeed beginning to look very serious; for the native warriors were all armed, and even should a fight result in victory for the side equipped with "thunder and lightning," it was on every ground desirable to avoid a conflict.

At this juncture Jacky's diplomacy saved the situation. Observing how the sweet fairylike girl had

attached herself to Ralph, he suggested that she might be more willing to return to the native quarters were he to accompany her ; and so, holding her new friend's right hand, while he carried his rifle on his left arm, and, accompanied by Billy, she tripped willingly off, the three chiefs alone remaining to complete, with Jacky's assistance, the negotiations upon which such important issues hung.

At last, to the intense relief of the whites, the trio expressed themselves satisfied with the terms offered by the Squatter, but still insisted that they must be allowed time to submit them to the other warriors of the tribe for ratification. As it was nearly sunset, and as the earnest wish of the ladies that the transfer should be effected that night could not now be realized, Jacky was ordered to return with the chiefs and bring Ralph and Billy back to camp. But in this they had reckoned without their host, for the tracker, after ten minutes' absence, reappeared and informed his master, with a grin, that the white piccaninny would not allow Mas'r Ralph out of her sight, and he had sent to ask if his father would permit him to remain for the night. Jacky, by way of clinching the matter, volunteered to bear Mas'r Ralph company, and he asked that Corporal Jenkins might also come, as he could take his turn of watching while Mas'r Ralph slept.

The Squatter was at first disinclined to agree, but his brother-in-law and the ladies, though on different grounds, warmly urged the plan—the Major because he thought it would be a further useful experience for his brave and self-reliant young nephew, the ladies by reason of nervous anxiety lest the child who had captured all hearts, alike by her loveliness and her sweet disposition, should after all be spirited away :

so Corporal Jenkins and Jacky, the former with his rifle, bearing with them some delicacies for the child, and an ample dinner for her new *protégé*, disappeared over the brow of the hill, to take up their quarters on the upper outskirts of the native village, and presently Billy, his occupation gone, returned disconsolate to his employer.

Before finally turning in, the two gentlemen strolled together on the banks of the gully, and noticed that there had been a phenomenally rapid decrease in the volume of water since mid-day ; indeed, it was obvious that, if the fall continued, the stream would once more be at its normal level, or, at any rate, fordable, within twenty-four hours.

But as this was no longer of importance to them, as affecting their plans, they merely noted the interesting fact as confirming Jacky's tale of snow-water floods ; so having finished their smoke, they sought their tent, and soon the whole camp, with the exception of the four sentries, of whom Billy was one, was wrapt in slumber.

CHAPTER IV.

"As wreath of snow before the morning sun
Would shrink and melt to nothingness away.
The tribes have vanished.
The kindly earth that unto them had been
A fruitful field, requiring toil nor pay,
Had sheltered them in forests, evergreen,
Now in her bosom hides them from life's busy scene."

—N.R.

THE RESCUE.

OVER the hill, the natives apparently did not believe in the maxim of "early to bed," though undoubtedly they were early risers. But to-night a general council was in progress, to consider and decide upon the offer of the white man to purchase their tribal pet. She herself, after romping with Ralph beyond her usual bedtime, and listening open-mouthed to the stories he told her with the aid of Jacky's translation, had long ago been conveyed to the care of the watchful gins: Ralph and Jacky were both sleeping soundly under a gigantic tree upon the rising ground on the eastern side of the village, some fifty yards above the huts, while Corporal Jenkins, rifle in hand, paced to and fro in the moonlight, doing "sentry-go" during the first watch.

By and by silence fell upon the village below. The council, whatever its decision, had concluded its deliberations, and no sound disturbed the night save the occasional bark of a dingo: all such minor noises as might be caused by busy opossums, wombats or wild cats, being effectually drowned by the ceaseless roar of rushing water in the gully which lay on the further side of the huts. Jenkins felt thankful that in this

wonderful southern land, boasting so many strange animals entirely unknown in other countries, there were at all events none of the great beasts of prey, such as lions, tigers or bears : for, had any such been in the neighbourhood, their approach would have been quite inaudible amid the pandemonium caused by the flood.

At midnight Jacky relieved the Corporal, but it seemed to the latter that he had no sooner closed his eyes, though two hours had really elapsed, than he was roughly aroused by the tracker, who, awakening Ralph cried hurriedly, "Take rifle. Village attacked ! Jacky go fetch white piccaninny." Then, as the two were about to follow him, he added imperatively, "Stay here, me come back," and darted away in the direction of the hut to which he had seen the child taken.

Meanwhile a great tumult had arisen at the opposite end of the village. The moon had set, and a thick mist overhung the native huts, so that the two watchers were quite unable to see what was happening ; but to the furious barking of dogs were instantly added more sinister sounds—yells of savage foes and screams of terrified women and children. Then the boy and his companion were startled by musket shots ; but to Ralph's urgent plea, "Oh, let us go and help," the steady soldier responded by a restraining hand on his arm, and the words, "Much better not, Master Ralph, Jacky knows his way where we should lose ourselves. Remember, he asked us to wait here for him : but keep your rifle ready, sir, the fight is working this way, and that firing means that there are whites in the scrimmage." Scarcely had he spoken, when in the gathering dawn a figure was seen to separate itself from the indistinctly defined objects in the mist below, and move rapidly towards them. A moment later

another figure emerged, evidently in pursuit. As the first of the runners neared them they recognized Jacky, and were delighted to see that he was carrying the white child. As they cheered him on, the pursuer, looking up, caught sight of them, and instantly afterwards there was a report, the black stumbled and, vainly endeavouring to recover himself, with a cry of "Mas'r Ralph!" he lurched heavily forward, and the little one, jerked from his arms, fell to the ground several yards in advance. The man who had fired, a big black-bearded ruffian, whose face was disfigured by a severe nasal fracture, disregarding the prostrate tracker, sped after the child, who, catching sight of her playmate of the previous evening, was on her feet running in his direction. To the intense horror of Ralph and Jenkins, the wretch was seen to pluck a revolver from his belt and deliberately aim at the child; but happily Ralph was too quick for him; now, indeed, was a grand opportunity of proving his skill as a marksman. Rapid as was the murderous aim, the boy's rifle spoke just a fraction of a second before his rival could pull the trigger, and as the revolver bullet buried itself harmlessly in the grass the white man's arm was seen to fall helpless at his side, and, turning, he fled in the opposite direction.

Simultaneously, loud shouts and rushing feet were heard on the brow of the hill, and the next moment Mr. Grant, Major Woodward, and fifteen armed followers appeared. They had been aroused by Billy, and now came on the scene in time to turn the tables effectively upon the raiders. Bidding Ralph take the frightened child to the care of his mother and aunt, Mr. Grant left Billy to look after his wounded friend, and placing himself and his party under the command of the

Major, and reinforced by Jenkins, they charged obliquely down the hill and took the attacking tribe and their white allies in flank. At the command "Fire!" eighteen rifles threw in a destructive volley. No second discharge was needed. The sudden appearance of what seemed to the superstitious natives to be supernatural reinforcements, added to the havoc wrought amongst them by a volley at such close quarters, damped their ardour, and caused instant and panic-stricken flight, leaving one white man dead upon the field, besides several dead and wounded blacks. Not pausing to reload their rifles, the Major's party gave chase as far as the gully, emptying their revolvers into the crowd of fugitives. Pell mell over the brink they fled, and their pursuers arrived in time to see, in the gathering dawn, how the crossing had been made practicable. A giant gum, whose roots had been dislodged by the flood, had thrown its eighty feet of smooth trunk across the gully, forming a natural bridge, and now, in headlong retreat, the hostile forces, black and white alike, were scrambling along the slippery tree. Nearly all who had essayed the crossing were already over, and disappearing in the bush on the further side. Some few, whose feet had failed to retain their hold, were precipitated to swift death below, and one white man, impeded by several wounded blacks, was still but half-way towards safety. Hearing the shouts in his rear, he drew his revolver and brutally shot two of the poor wretches in front of him, in order to clear a passage, and would have succeeded in escaping had not a shot from the police-sergeant at that moment entered his brain, so that his body followed those of his two victims, to be carried away by the roaring stream.

The invasion was effectually repelled; there could

be no question of a further attack, for the enemy were far too demoralized to dream of rallying. But alas, brief as was the struggle, it had been rather a massacre than a fight. And although victory, thanks to the opportune arrival of their white friends, lay with the local blacks, the slaughter had been very terrible. The village, but for the belated barking of dogs, would have had no warning whatever, for, incredible as it may seem, no sentries had been placed, and the foe, aided by the noise of rushing water and the fact that a northerly wind was blowing, had been able to creep quite close to the huts before the dogs had taken alarm : for sound and scent had alike been prevented from reaching them, a most unfortunate and unusual conjunction for the unhappy villagers.

As the party of whites, themselves entirely unscathed, retraced their steps from the gully, a fair new morning broke upon the world. The sun burst suddenly forth in its splendour ; but how changed was the scene from that which sunset had witnessed on the previous evening. The happy romping children, the groups of gins contentedly gossiping after the labours of the day, the warriors pacing to and fro in conscious superiority to the mere womenfolk—where were all these now ?

Of the five hundred odd inhabitants of the village, more than a quarter lay dead or sorely wounded within or around the huts. The deadly spear, club and boomerang of the hostile blacks, the musket and pistol of the bushrangers, had done their work all too surely. Happier were they to whom death had come swiftly than others whose gaping wounds were utterly beyond the limited powers of primitive native surgery. Ordinary fractures, cuts, and even many stabs they

could deal with, but in other cases the sufferer's life must ebb away while friends and relatives looked on mournfully at the tragedy with which they were helpless to cope. The children had in almost every instance been killed by a single blow which had fractured the skull, but it was otherwise with those who had resisted.

And now that the fight was over, Mr. Grant despatched four of his men to the camp for bandages, splints and lint, indeed the whole assortment of first aid accessories, which had formed an essential part of the expedition's equipment ; and when the messengers returned they were accompanied by Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Woodward and Ralph, all eager to render assistance, the little child having been hushed off to sleep and left in charge of the maids.

For upwards of two hours every one was busy. Scarcely one of Mr. Grant's followers was ignorant of elementary surgery, and what some of them lacked in skill they made up by ready and sympathetic assistance of their abler comrades. Meanwhile Ah Fang and the cook's mate appeared, bearing two great cans of fragrant coffee, with a basket containing cups and biscuits, and of this welcome refreshment all the workers and many of the wounded thankfully partook.

Mrs. Grant's ministrations to the suffering gins were invaluable ; but there was not a single case of a wounded child : those little ones who had not escaped uninjured were killed outright. Ralph's first concern was for the heroic Jacky, whose wound was happily not a dangerous one. It was found that the bushranger's bullet had lodged in the tracker's right thigh, without even touching the bone, and when once this bullet was extracted—an operation performed presently by two of

the stockmen with the police-sergeant's assistance, and borne with stoical fortitude by the patient—a few days' rest and careful nursing would see the hardy native on his feet again. Ralph, with the assistance of Billy and a couple of young natives, carried the wounded man to the camp as soon as the necessary bandaging was completed, and, once there, he was comfortably installed on a soft couch formed of several blankets placed in the shade. Then, relieving the maids' watch over the still sleeping child, the boy enabled them to supplement the efforts to mitigate the sufferings of the poor native women, while Billy was sent back to the village to act as interpreter.

At half-past six Ah Fang hinted that breakfast was nearly ready, and the cook's mate proclaimed the fact far and wide by a bugle call, a welcome sound indeed to the tired workers beyond the hill. Ablutions were very necessary after their occupation during those early morning hours; yet when the second summons pealed forth and the meal was served, all were ready to do justice to it, both in front of the family tents and in the men's quarters. But before touching the food, the entire party knelt while the Squatter solemnly recited the "Thanksgiving for Peace and Deliverance from our Enemies;" then every voice joined in repeating the Lord's Prayer, and rising, all heartily sang the Doxology, the white child, with wide wondering eyes, holding Ralph's hand the while.

During breakfast Mr. Grant delighted them all by telling of his conversation, through Billy, with the head men. The entire body of warriors, in consideration of the inestimable service rendered to the tribe, were now anxious that the white piccaninny should remain with her rescuers; indeed, they went so far as

to concur in declaring that they could not, under the circumstances, take anything by way of barter : but to this the Squatter would not consent, and insisted that the bargain of the previous day should stand.

" And now, my bonnie bairn," said he, taking the child upon his knee, and kissing her tenderly, " what are we to call you ? "

" Come, Ralph, my boy, you are the youngest ; what name do you suggest ? "

Looking admiringly into the face of the happy child, happy in the possession of so many new and congenial friends, he said, " I should like to call her Enid. She reminds me so of the heroine of one of the idylls in that book of Mr. Tennyson's poems you gave me on my last birthday."

" What do you say, bairnie ? " said the Squatter, " shall we call you ' Enid.' ? "

As he emphasized the name and, stroking the fair head resting on his shoulder, repeated musingly, " Enid, Enid," the child seemed struck with the new word, and endeavoured to repeat it after him.

" Well, Aleck," interposed Mrs. Woodward, " you haven't asked for other opinions, but as I am the next in age to Ralph, I volunteer mine."

" My dear Barbara," cried her brother-in-law, raising his hat, " I apologise most sincerely. Pray what is your choice ? "

" I endorse Ralph's proposal. Enid would be charming ; don't you think so yourself, girlie, shall it be Enid ? " And as though answering the question, the little one clapped her hands and cried, " Enid ! Enid ! "

" There, I fancy that settles the point," laughed the Squatter ; and, his wife and the Major agreeing, he kissed the child again, and tapping her playfully with

his forefinger, once more repeated "Enid." Then, pointing to himself, he said very distinctly, "Father," and was gratified to hear her make a very creditable attempt to pronounce the word. And so round the circle—"Mother," "Auntie," "Uncle." But when he reached the final "Ralph," listening intently for the name of her playmate and protector, she jumped from Mr. Grant's knee and banging her chubby little hands on the boy's cheeks, cried delightedly, "Rafe ! Rafe ! ", to everyone's amusement and her new brother's intense satisfaction.

In view of the disturbance of the previous night and the arduous and fatiguing labours it had entailed, it was decided that the return journey must of necessity be deferred, as all were too weary to make a start that day; while the next day was Sunday, which throughout the trip was rigidly observed as a day of rest.

The enforced postponement was not regarded by any one as a hardship: the wounded tracker would certainly benefit by the arrangement, and further opportunity would be afforded for visiting and helping the poor folk in the native village.

During the hottest hours every one thankfully seized the chance of making up for previous loss of sleep, whilst towards evening many of the party went on errands of mercy to the natives, their visits being received with every evidence of grateful appreciation.

As for little Enid, she displayed such a thirst for knowledge that before bedtime she had not only mastered the names of her five new relatives, but when asked, could point out Ah Fang, Jenkins, Jacky and Billy. Indeed, to the wounded tracker she was particularly attentive, and gained many grateful smiles by taking him cups of water and by sitting at his side

driving away insects with the aid of an ingeniously-contrived fan with which her devoted knight had provided her. Afterwards the ladies noticed her spending quite a long time in close and mysterious conversation with Ralph, aided by Jacky as willing interpreter, and presently she triumphantly finished the day's achievements by trotting up to Mr. Grant, on his return from the village, and saying very clearly and prettily, "Good night, father!"

When she had finally been put to rest in the ladies' sleeping tent, the Squatter heard the story of her spontaneously installing herself as nurse to the brave Jacky, to whose timely intervention she owed her escape from the slaughter of the previous night.

"Ah, that must indeed have been a very sweet picture, said he. "It is most pathetic that her parents should not be living to see the dear wee bairn; but I fear we must conclude that her father perished in the bush fire after placing her poor mother in safety amongst the blacks. Well, Lilian, my love, if what took place this afternoon may be taken as a fair indication of the dear child's natural character, we must conclude that this unselfish disposition, this evident desire to comfort those who suffer, is probably a matter of heredity, and one can only trust that the mother whom she lost at her birth may be permitted in her heavenly home, to see the development of these gracious qualities in her child. As for ourselves, we may thank God for giving us such a daughter, and I'm sure my Lilian will be a wise and loving mother to her, won't you, dear?"

"I hope so, Aléck. My heart goes out to this little orphan, and it would seem that God is specially honouring us by committing her to our care. We must

indeed undertake her training as a sacred trust."

"And now," resumed Mr. Grant, "you will all be interested to hear that I have been making very close enquiry into the circumstances attending the poor lady's arrival amongst the natives. From what Billy has elicited, under my direction, it appears that they were living, four years ago, fully three hundred miles south of this spot, indeed not very far from the coast, and their village stood upon the northern shore of a long but narrow lake, which provided them with abundance of fish and of wild fowl. The country on this side of the lake was open, but from its southern side there was unbroken forest stretching away to the distant ocean. That fine tall black fellow, the leader of the three who first came to us yesterday morning, was one summer's evening fishing on the opposite side of the lake, when he noticed that a bush fire was rapidly working up from the southward. Of course there was the usual flight of frightened birds and stampede of animals and reptiles; but he was startled, when about to head his canoe for the northern shore and safety, to find himself hailed by a white man, who carried an unconscious woman in his arms and made signs to him to take her into the canoe. He assisted to lay her in the frail craft, and then paddled rapidly across, indicating to the white man that he should step into the water and remain there until he could return for him. Making all speed to the village, he placed the poor woman in the care of the gins, and, with other warriors in their canoes, crossed once more to the southern side, where the fire was now raging down to the lake. But they could find no trace of the white man, and the next day, when they were able to search, they discovered, a little distance from the shore, the bodies

of two men and a woman, and they concluded, and probably quite correctly, that the man who placed the helpless woman in the canoe had gone back to assist the others instead of profiting by the black's advice to immerse himself in the lake. The little girl, our little Enid, was born during the night, and the poor mother died almost immediately, and was buried upon the lake side. The only articles retained by the natives were the watch and chain which, they tell me, the child constantly wears about her neck. Now Lilian, my love, I should like to examine that watch ; we may possibly obtain some clue which will assist me in making enquiries hereafter."

The watch was fetched, and most carefully inspected within and without, but beyond the fact that it was a lady's gold hunter of fine workmanship and of peculiar thickness, and evidently of great value, and that the chain, too, was of remarkable beauty and of delicate design, there was no indication whatever that there before them, yet concealed from their sight, lay the key to more than one mystery which for long years to come must remain mysteries, but would in the fullness of time be made clear and plain.

On the following day divine service was conducted in the white men's camp, and those of the natives who were able to attend gathered round to watch in astonishment while prayers were offered and hymns of praise were tunefully sung to the accompaniment of the cornet. Indeed, some additional hymns were specially rendered for the benefit of the villagers, to whom Mr. Grant in brief sentences endeavoured to explain, through Billy, that the white folks were addressing the great God above the sky. They could not comprehend anything ; yet even for them the coming years were to

bring the greatest blessing earth can show, even to "know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."

Monday saw the camp still undisturbed, but on Tuesday the tents were struck and the homeward journey, by easy stages, was begun. Jacky was, willy nilly, forced to overcome his objection to the white folks' method of progression, and was carried in a blanket skilfully slung between two of the pack-horses.

Bannockburn was reached in twenty-one days, without a hitch of any kind, and at a general gathering in the great hall on Christmas Day, to which all the station hands were invited, the rescued child was formally presented to the assembly by Mr. Grant as "my ain wee bairn, my dear daughter Enid, whose fourth birthday we celebrate to-day," and loud and cordial was the welcome she received and deep the impression she made.

From that moment she was treated and she behaved as though occupying the position of sole daughter of the house by right of birth. Yet, warm as was the affection the Squatter felt for his adopted child, he did not for a moment permit it to stifle his sense of the moral duty of making every possible effort to elucidate the mystery of her parentage. The colonial newspapers of the day published detailed accounts of the adventurous expedition and its dramatic success, and these articles were copied by both English and American journals. But although the story was thus circulated throughout the world, not a single enquiry ever reached the child's guardians, and as the years passed quickly away and the lovely girl of four grew towards womanhood, no stranger, witnessing the intense and affectionate devotion subsisting between Enid and her

ostensible relatives, would have doubted for a single instant that the tie was one of blood rather than adoption.

From the very first, every advantage which lavish affection could suggest or great wealth command was bestowed without stint, and gratifying indeed was it to witness the response, alike in mental culture, in physical development, in a daughter's unselfish thoughtfulness towards the parents she so dearly loved, and, above all, in a deep and true piety.

With regard to the domestic servants, and the numerous hands on the extensive Bannockburn domain, they were one and all Enid's devoted admirers, and every face wore a bright smile and every tongue uttered words of welcome when she drew near, for was she not, as Angus, the head gardener, expressed it, "a sicht for sair een ? "

CHAPTER V.

" She never found fault with you,
Never implied your wrong by her right,
And yet men at her side grew nobler,
Girls purer . . .
Few knelt at her feet confessed lovers in thrall
They knelt more to God than they used—
That was all."

—E. B. Browning.

DE PROFUNDIS.

FOURTEEN years have passed since the exciting events chronicled in the preceding chapters.

Ralph, after studying at home under resident tutors, spent two years at college in Adelaide, proceeding to England at the age of nineteen.

Entering at Caius College, Cambridge, he took the full Arts course, then studied for the Cambridge M.B., and finally spent three strenuous years at the London Hospital, thus fully attaining the object upon which his heart had been set ever since the tragic occurrences attending Enid's rescue.

Christmas has come round once more. By Ralph it is being spent in Devonshire, at the home of his college chum Gerald Carew, who holds a curacy in an East End parish not far from the hospital. It is to be his last Christmas in England, and not only is the cold unusually severe, but his heart too is chilled and apprehensive by reason of the sad news which the Australian mail has brought. The letter which reached him on Christmas Eve told of his mother's serious illness, and, reading between the lines, his professional intuition filled him with gravest apprehension as to what complications might have arisen.

As the two friends left the house, accompanying

Carew's widowed mother to the joyous Christmas morning service, poor Ralph's heart was singularly out of harmony with the glad pealing of "happy bells across the snow," and when Mrs. Carew exclaimed, "There is news for you, Mr. Grant; that is the pony from the village post-office," the poor fellow trembled as the fateful cablegram was handed to him, and could scarcely summon courage to tear it open. But when the words "Quite out of danger" met his eye, the revulsion of feeling found utterance in a cry of thankfulness, and while his companions read the message he proceeded to make the small son of the village post-mistress the wealthiest lad in the neighbourhood.

Had he known that the young scamp had carried that cablegram for twenty-four hours in his pocket, lest its delivery should interfere with certain skating arrangements he had made with other village lads, perhaps that bright half-sovereign might have remained in his purse.

Some nine hours earlier, but at the same hour by local time, a tall and lovely golden-haired girl sat at the writing table in her boudoir twelve hundred miles distant from snow-shrouded Devonshire. Within, all is delightfully cool, and the daintily furnished room is fragrant with the odour of roses and of many rare and exquisite blooms which Angus has culled for the "bonnie leddy" whose sway over the dour Scot is absolute.

Enid is writing for the English mail. Looking over her shoulder we see:—"First of all, Ralph, you will rejoice with us in knowing that mother's illness has at last taken a favourable turn. The moment Dr. Gordon had pronounced yesterday the magic words 'out of danger,' daddy said, 'Excuse me, I must send word to my boy,' and raced out of the room to cable at once,

so that you might receive the good news before our letters, posted a month ago, could reach you. We were intensely thankful for this, as it would save you so much distress. When daddy returned, the dear old doctor quaintly assured us that 'nothing is henceforth needed but plenty of kitchen physic.'

"Now that the horizon is bright, we can afford to look back to the dark days during which we seemed to be in the valley of the shadow of death. Poor daddy ! It was piteous to see his sorrow, the more so because he most unjustly blamed himself for not having seen that mother's health was failing. When I told Dr. Gordon of this he turned upon daddy quite savagely (you know his admirable acting), saying, 'Don't be an ass, Sandy ! I've known ye all your married life, and if any man dared to say to me that there exists in Her Majesty's dominions a more loving or more considerate husband than yersel, I'd ca' him a liar !' I daresay you can picture the old man's tones and attitude as he made this irate little speech, and when daddy turned his haggard face and said, 'Ah, Jamie, you're kind, and I value your good feeling, but 'the heart knoweth its own bitterness,' the doctor stamped on the floor, crying 'Tommy rot ! Kindness and good feeling indeed ! I'm simply talking common sense, while as for you, if ye gang to yer wife's bedside wi' a face as lang as a feedle, ye'll just bring aboot a' the ills we wad gladly avoid. Now, Miss Enid, my dear, the nurse is with your mother, so just open the piano, and I'll see if my pipes are in good order, and if my patient hears me, so much the better.'

"As I turned to the piano, I noticed Angus on the verandah, apparently engrossed with his plants, but doubtless he had been keenly enjoying this outburst

of his old fellow countryman, for I know he had more than once adopted a similar tone with daddy. Well, you know what the old doctor is when once he can get an accompanist, and "Mary of Argyle" was followed by half-a-dozen other songs in his lovely tenor, before, with a sly glance at daddy's happier face, he exclaimed, 'There, young lady, I can't let you waste any more of my time, I'll be here at the same hour to-morrow.' Curiously, Angus simultaneously discovered that the verandah plants required no further attention! And now, before leaving this subject, let me tell you of an interesting sequel. When Dr. Gordon had seen mother the next morning and had finished his daily consultation with the nurse, he came gleefully to me with a sheet of notepaper in his hand, saying, 'Look here, my dear young lady, just see what auld Angus has given me, or rather what he wrote to me and posted yesterday after I left here, so that it reached me with my coffee and rashers this morning. The old fellow has been exercising his poetic gift again; I must go and scold him for such sad waste of time. Perhaps you would like to copy out the lines while I'm gone.' So I took the doctor at his word, and herewith again copy them for your benefit. You will see why Angus lingered by the open window. Here they are:—

'Eh, Jamie man! Dear brither Scot!
I ken your sweet an' winsome smile.
Yer forceful utterance—"Tommy rot"!
Yer tender "Mary of Argyle."
Mony sair hearts ye're makin' glad
Wi' warblin' sangs throughout the day.
Gang on! gang on! ye bonnie lad,
The even tenor of yer way.'

Don't you agree with me in thinking that the doctor, spite of his rough words, probably felt very much gratified and pleased?

" Since the great strain ceased, it is possible to look back and smile at some of the daily incidents, especially where the kindly old doctor was concerned ; but, viewed as a whole, the retrospect is a very painful one, and we are as yet scarcely able to grasp the joyous fact that our loved one is on the road to recovery.

" And now, dear Ralph, ten thousand thanks for the lovely birthday gift which was lying by my plate at breakfast this morning. Your combined Christmas and birthday greeting could not have taken a more welcome form than your portrait, unless, indeed, it had been your dear self. But we have the comfort of knowing that you will (D.V.) spend next Christmas at home, after your long absence. Can you realize that fourteen years ago to-day I spent Christmas at Bannockburn for the first time ? It was such a happy decision of daddy's to regard that day as the fourth anniversary of my birth. There could be no doubt as to my being four years old, and from all we have learned through the natives the bush fire must have occurred towards the end of December.

" Shall you be going to River Hills after leaving Devonshire, I wonder. It is interesting to picture you in all these English places, so familiar by hearsay, but entirely unknown to me. You may say I'm foolishly fanciful, yet I cannot but think that were I to visit the old country I should in some way come across the clue to my parentage. Don't think me ungrateful. I most deeply and thankfully appreciate the love and care which have without stint been shewn to me by dear daddy, mother and yourself ; but since there exists a doubt, I am unable to repress the longing to solve it, if a solution be possible.

" Our Christmas Day service was held in the Lecture

Hall, at seven o'clock this morning. At daily morning prayer for many weeks past there has been special intercession for dear mother's recovery. It was so delightful to-day to be able to give thanks instead.

"The new church grows apace, and already one can realize how imposing an edifice it will be when completed. No better position could have been found for it than the summit of Acacia Hill, whence it will be seen quite distinctly for thirty miles. The Bishop has fixed the consecration for November, and the Governor has intimated his wish to be present, so we shall have quite a house-full, I expect. Now mind, you must not allow anything to prevent your being at home for the event.

"It is strange to think of you to-day as possibly surrounded by snow and wearing heavy winter garments ; the cablegrams speak of very abnormally cold weather in Europe. I was so glad at last to see snow, when we were visiting Sydney in July, and daddy took us for a trip to the Blue Mountains. But this morning as I write, the mind seems incapable of realizing a temperature below freezing, for the Christmas Day heat is intense, and I am reminded of that time four years ago last June when you had uncle and aunt Woodward and May at Cambridge for the boat races, and wrote telling us of the grilling time you all suffered."

* * * * *

This was not the end of the letter, but we will look into Mr. Grant's study and note what he has to say to his absent son. After referring to the engrossing topic of Mrs. Grant's illness he adds :—"God has been very merciful to us. Yesterday the doctor pronounced her out of danger, or, to be exact, the old fellow said, 'She no longer stands in any danger from the disease, but

there is very grave danger of her being over petted ! ' but you know what an incorrigible *farceur* he is, yet as true and leal a Scot as ever stepped, and, withal, undoubtedly clever. His brusque manner is perhaps better suited to the back blocks than to Belgravia, but he has a heart of gold.

" I cannot find words to tell you what Enid has been to me through all this time of sorrow. Gordon took me aside yesterday and said, ' Grant, we know that life and death are in the hands of the Lord, but humanly speaking, you owe your wife's recovery not so much to the doctor or the nurses—though they are both of them treasures in their way, the best I could obtain from Adelaide—as to the capable, wise and untiring devotion of that dear child Enid. I have more than once stood in amazed admiration of her intuitive skill in dealing with the patient.'

" And it is not only what she has done for the sufferer, but the perfect success with which she has handled every detail of household affairs.

" During our last stay at Adelaide both your mother and I were struck with the singular ease with which, while entering heartily into the many social functions of the capital, she contrived to impress upon her numerous male admirers that she was superior to the foibles attributed to the sex. It is within my knowledge that she refused four offers of marriage, for the four luckless men had each very honourably approached me in the first instance. In one case especially I was sorry for the poor fellow. It was Hector Tennant, brother of Enid's friend Helen Tennant, of whom she has probably told you. He is a nice lad of good family, and his father is M.P. for the division in which his property lies. But notwithstanding their respective

qualifications my bairn said ' no ' to them all. I have often wondered whether my early dream of marriage between Enid and my son would some day be realized ; but much as I should rejoice in such a union I would not raise a little finger to influence either of you.

" Angus is not getting younger. He was twenty years my senior when I brought him from Scotland, and latterly he has led a very arduous life, for the Lands Department borrowed him from me for some months in order to benefit by his knowledge of forestry. Indeed, he was offered a tempting salary to take service under Government, but the Minister told me afterwards that he had absolutely declined to leave me. His influence over the men on the station has ever made for righteousness, and though he can speak words of stern reproof when occasion requires, he has the tenderness of a woman when dealing with those who are in suffering or sorrow.

" One day when your dear mother was so ill that recovery seemed absolutely hopeless, I strolled through the gardens and met Angus just coming to the house with some flowers specially gathered for the sick room, a votive offering which he never failed to make twice daily. Seeing how deeply depressed I was that morning, he said in his quaint, apparently irrelevant manner, ' I tak great pains an' pride in the culture of fine peaches. I daily feast my twa een upon the rich bloom an' beauty o' the ripenin' fruit. But after a' I'm but the gairdner. The care an' culture are my ain, but it wad ill become me to fash mysel if you, my maister, cam intil the gairden an' picked the verra finest peach upon the tree. It is a' yer ain, an' to tak o' the verra best is yer right. It is for me to feel satisfaction that ye have gotten it. An' noo, if the

heavenly Father wad tak away ane wha is sae ripe
an' ready to gang hame, may He gie ye grace to rise
aboон yer ain natural grief an' remember the words
' to depairt an' to be wi' Christ, which is *far* better.'

"They are a remarkable couple, these two Scots, Dr. Gordon and Angus. Both bachelors, both of rough exterior, but each in his way a helper of others. I'm sure that Gordon with his ever-ready songs, and Angus with his little rhymes, must between them have lightened many a burden.

"I hadn't the heart to write by last mail of matters outside our personal anxieties, but it will, I know, interest you to hear—though doubtless you have gleaned from the newspapers—that a time of prosperity has followed upon the disastrous period through which the country passed a few months ago. I have always felt assured of a magnificent future for this State, provided the reins were held by level-headed patriots, men capable of so grappling with a crisis as to avert panic, and, the crisis passed, setting themselves resolutely to the task of preventing its recurrence by energetically developing the natural resources of the country. This, I rejoice to say, is being done.

"The terrible drought of a year ago, succeeded by acute financial strain, these in turn followed by devastating floods, all had their lessons for us, and there is abundant indication that these lessons are being thoroughly learned.

"Thirty-one years ago I foresaw that neither in the pastoral industry nor in the exploitation of minerals could the ultimate wealth of the State find a sufficiently solid foundation. I was convinced then, and experience has strengthened my belief, that in the encouragement of agriculture and fruit growing would be found the

Government's wisest policy. There are millions of acres of rich deep alluvial soil only needing irrigation to render this the finest fruit-growing country in the world. I have shown at Bannockburn how much can be done in the breeding of horses and cattle and in the profitable culture of fruit, while in other parts of the State there are vast areas only awaiting the plough and good seed in order to yield phenomenal crops of wheat for the world's markets. It may not come in my day, but certainly the future will see an enormous increase of immigration into this State of men who by methods of intense culture will win from the soil such remunerative results as were never dreamed of by the early settlers.

" Amid so much that was calamitous, there were here and there some interesting and remarkable incidents in connection with the floods. Ramsay has always hauled his annual clip forty miles from his station to the nearest point on the Murray, whence it has gone down in barges. But last August one of the river steamers made a bee-line at right-angles across the inundated country, took a heavy cargo of wool on board at the foot of the rising ground on which the station buildings stand, and steamed back over the forty miles of drowned land to the Murray. The flood lasted just long enough for the steamer to complete two trips, but the skipper wouldn't venture a third, lest a sudden fall should neutralize all the profit on the two successful runs by the loss of his steamer. Had he been in England, or even in America, he might have chanced it, for the novelty of seeing a steamship lying high and dry many miles from the river would have attracted excursionists by the thousand and proved a very remunerative show. But there, where the nearest

neighbours are a hundred and fifty miles away, and the nearest populous town five hundred miles, such a risk was not to be thought of. I heard from my old friend Dingle, who has lived on the banks of the Darling twenty-five years, that he and his three sons never went to bed for three months, so continuous were the calls to repair the dams erected round the property.

"The sundowner nuisance has been worse than ever this season. One evening a few weeks ago Webb had no fewer than a hundred and three of them applying for 'tucker' and a night's lodging. Every one of them received a pannikin of flour, with tea, sugar, and a shoulder of mutton! I shall really be obliged to put my foot down, as other pastoralists have done, and say *No!* These fellows are many of them incorrigible rogues and vagabonds, and would in England be dealt with as such; but unfortunately our traditions of hospitality forbid our turning them away, and besides, there is a sprinkling of true men amongst them who would be glad of work.

"I heard a good story from Dr. Gordon of what happened at a station fifty miles on the other side of his house, where the new rule obtains of refusing to entertain sundowners. An old fellow with bent back and tottering footsteps came to the door and humbly solicited permission to eat the grass on the well-watered lawn. Leave being given, he set to work, throwing a glance over his shoulder from time to time to see if the mistress of the house would relent. Presently a maid called him. Jumping up with alacrity in the certain belief that a square meal awaited him, he received the message 'Missus says you'll find the grass longer in the back paddock, if you like to go there.' That decrepit rascal saw the game was up, and seizing his swag he

cleared with a step which showed abundant manly vigour.

" Enid has probably told you about the progress of the new church. But another building is taking shape in my mind of which I have as yet spoken to no one. In one of your letters you suggested the erection of an infirmary, with a couple of wards and the necessary rooms for out-patients, doctor, nurse, &c. I am thinking of asking Mason, the architect of the church, and whose father designed the house for me nearly thirty years ago, to prepare plans at once, as I should like to erect the building as a thank-offering to God for your dear mother's recovery. I trust you will be at home again in time for the formal opening.

" By the way, I was nearly forgetting one story which I had been reserving for you, as I was sure you would never hear it from Enid, except perhaps in a very diluted form. About a year ago, while we were visiting Adelaide, dear old Rawlinson called one day. Both your mother and I were out, so Enid entertained him. From what he tells me he was much struck by some emphatic remark she made as to our Lord's teaching of self-denial. Whatever it was he was so impressed that, forgetting she was a girl and he an old man, he actually consulted her about his financial position.

" ' You see,' said he, ' I have for many years been in receipt of a large salary, and have, in view of retirement, put by so much every year out of my income. All the savings of a lifetime are invested in bank shares, and I have to-day received a private hint from one of the directors to sell all my shares without a moment's delay. Now, on the one hand I'm confronted with absolute poverty in my old age, for I must shortly vacate my appointment under the age-limit ; but on the other

hand if I save everything by instructing a broker to sell my holding on to-day's market, it appears to me I am deliberately passing on to another what I know he would not purchase were he aware of the secret information I have received. What do you say ?'

" Enid, with emotion, said, ' Oh how grieved I am to hear this, Mr. Rawlinson, and how distressed to be obliged to say what I must. It seems to me that, as a Christian, you have no alternative. *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself* admits of no such dealing as your friend advised.' Well, to shorten the story, he didn't sell, and the next day the bank stopped payment. But the sequel is very remarkable. He saved nearly every penny of the current year's salary and put it all into Broken Hill shares, for the Company was just then being formed to work the marvellous newly discovered silver deposits. To-day he is worth thirty thousand pounds ! As he remarked to me when telling his tale, ' Even if I had been a pauper for the rest of my days, I should have had the consolation of having obeyed my Lord ; but as it is, He has been graciously pleased to give me more than I lost.'

" It is a touching story, and reminds me of some lines by Russell Lowell I came across the other day, written on a postcard to some one who sought his opinion as to a shady action of the kind Rawlinson's friend advised :

' In vain we call old notions 'fudge,'
And bend our conscience to our dealing.
The Ten Commandments will not budge
And stealing will continue stealing.'

" Now good-bye, dear lad,

Your affectionate father,

ALEXR. GRANT."

CHAPTER VI.

"Dread spirits ! to torment the good
Why wander from your course so far ?
Disordering colour, form and stature !
Let good men feel the soul of nature,
And see things as they are."

—*Wordsworth.*

RIVER HILLS.

"COME along, Ralph, I've had quite as much of these reports as I can digest. Come out, you young book-worm, you'll be showing grey hairs presently, if you grind so hard."

For three solid hours Major Woodward and his nephew had been ensconced in the library, absorbed respectively in the study of reports upon county matters and abstruse medical works. For Ralph was paying a farewell visit to his English relatives at River Hills Hall before returning to Australia after his eight years' absence, and had already booked passages for himself and his old Cambridge chum Carew, whose health had suffered through overstrain in his East End curacy.

The stable clock had chimed the hour of noon, when the Squire leapt from his chair and roused his studious companion. Summoning May to join them in a spin before lunch, and whistling to a couple of greyhounds, they had already started in a bee-line for the river, when May remembered that she had a message for old Nurse Brick as to some needlework she was doing for Mrs. Woodward, and begged to go round by the Lodge.

The two gentlemen strolled slowly on while the girl executed her commission, but presently were recalled

by a startled exclamation, and they turned to see her, with a rather white face, imperatively beckoning them.

" Why, what's amiss, child ? You look as if you had seen a ghost ! "

" No, father, I've not ; but poor old nursery declares that she has, and she seems quite ill and upset ; do come in and comfort her up, you can help her better than anyone."

" Why, Mrs. Brick, what's the trouble ? " cheerily exclaimed the Major, as he and Ralph stepped into the bright and cosy sitting-room. " This glorious sunshine ought to make you as happy as a sandboy."

" Oh, I've no fault to find with the sunshine, zur, bless the good Lord for it, but it's the night-time as I dreads." And then, bursting into sobs, the poor old soul wailed, " It's no manner o' use Master Marmadook—Squire, however—I can't abide they ghosties nohow."

" Why, of course you can't, Mrs. Brick ; no one could. But what do you mean by ghosts ; what have you seen, or fancied that you saw ? "

" Oh, 'twarnt no fancy, zur. I seed shadders on the wall last night, agin and agin, and at last I dressed myself and lit my kitchen fire, and sat there till morning."

" And what time did this happen ? "

" About midnight, zur," muttered the awestricken woman, " just after I heered the big clock up at the Hall."

" Ah, no wonder you look hipped, if you've been up since midnight."

" Oh, 'taint that, zur ; many's the time I was up all night with you, Master Marmadook, when you was ill as a child. Oh no, it's the fright of it, zur. It were awful, it were."

" But why do you think the shadows were thrown by ghosts ? For my part, I don't believe in ghosts, and never yet heard of a so-called ghost that could not be satisfactorily accounted for. Besides, a ghost would not be a solid body, so how could it cast a shadow ? Now what do you say to bats or owls—could *they* have troubled you ? Or maybe it was rats ? "

" Bless ye, no, zur. There baint no rats here, I be zure. No zur, stands to reason it couldn't be rats, coz Jack there would ha' gone for 'em mighty quick, though 'e 'ave lost his front teeth, poor old dawg. No, zur, nor owls, nor bats, neither, coz how would they have got inside the room ; seein' as 'ow the curtains was acrosst the winder, though the winder itself was open, sure enough ! And then, zur, as to what you says about 'solid body,' why, I aint no scholard, and can't arguify 'long of a eddicated gentleman like you ; but all the book larnin' in the world can't explain away them shadders, there they *was* ! "

" But, Mrs. Brick," said Ralph, laughing, " in order to produce a shadow you must have a *substance*—that is, something solid—and behind that solid substance there must be a light. But you say this all happened at midnight, when your room would be in darkness, for there was not even a moon last night."

" Now, Master Ralph, doant 'e go to try for to confuse an old ooman. You be as bad as your uncle here. But I never zaid as the room was dark, coz I had a nightlight a'burnin' at the side of the bed."

" Oh, a *nightlight* ! Now I begin to see daylight ! " cried the Major.

" Well, father," laughed May, " I daresay nurse will forgive your awful pun if you can set her mind at rest about the 'ghosties.' "

"Oh, I don't say that I can, my dear, but the mention of a nightlight suggested a possible solution. Do you mind our seeing your bedroom, Mrs. Brick?"

"Lor', no zur, it's all tidy, if you'll please to step in."

"Tidy! why, mine ancient nurse, being *yours*, how could it possibly be *untidy*? You must know, Ralph, that Mrs. Brick and tidiness are synonyms. She tidied the nursery in the far away days when your mother and I were its reigning monarchs—or perhaps I should express that differently and say that your mother was the queen, and I her prime minister; eh, nurse, what do you say?"

"What I says, Master Marmadook, is if so be you was the prime minister, you mostly managed to get the queen to see things to your way o' thinkin'"—a statement at which May clapped her hands with delight and exclaimed, "Oh thank you, nursey, for giving us a little picture of father as he was nearly half a century ago."

"Oh come, come, don't tell tales out of school! I don't want to forfeit my nephew's good opinion. As for my daughter, I fear you have already sown seeds of sad disrespect and insubordination in her young mind."

"Well, Squoire, you'll never lose anybody's good opinion 'long o' anything I says about you. Coz though you did most in general get your own way, you got it by kindness, and wheedlin', an' not by nasty ill-tempered bullyin' ways, as I've seen some young gentlemen do as oughter known better. And besides, the queen, as you calls her, was that unselfish she couldn't abear to think as she were 'avin' anything as weren't just to your likin'."

"Thank you, my dear old nurse," said the Major, with feeling. "You see, Ralph, your dear mother,

even then, was well nigh perfect, just as you know her to be to-day. And now, Mrs. Brick, please show us that tidy room of yours. We want to get down to the river and back before luncheon."

They all passed into the adjoining apartment, the *beau ideal* of a country bedroom, with its spotlessly white bed-furniture, and its lace window curtains and short blind shading the room from the blazing sun, and softening the tints of the crimson rambler and purple clematis which hung in festoons outside.

" You see, zur, although I has my winder wide open, I'm obliged to keep the curtains drawn right acrosst it, along o' they worritin' flies an' waspses ; but they gets in somehow in spite o' me, drat 'em."

" Ah, flies ! " cried the Major. " Make a note of that, Ralph. First a nightlight, then flies. May, my dear, I verily believe we are on the track of that ghost. I fancy it's a sort of phantom I've met with in India."

" Exactly, uncle," said Ralph ; " I begin to think there were similar ghosts in my rooms at Caius whenever I burned midnight oil in warm weather."

" Really, I can't imagine what you two are driving at ; but I don't mind your keeping the secret to yourselves if you'll only dispel poor nursey's fears."

" My dear child, it can't be expected that you, a mere woman, could grasp what is clear to our superior intelligence ; but there shall be no secret, for we are about to reconstruct the tragedy, as they say in the French courts."

" Now, nurse, please draw down that green blind."

" Bless you, zur, if I does that, it'll make the room quite dark, jest as if it was night."

" Precisely, that is what we want. Thank you.

Now light your nightlight, please, and put it exactly in the position where it was last night."

A small wicker table was lifted from the corner and placed beside the bed. The nightlight, standing in a saucer of water upon the table, was lighted, and Mrs. Brick, looking very much amused, asked, "Well, zur, will that do?"

"Not quite. Just bring in two more chairs, and then shut the door between this and the sitting-room, for we must be quite in the dark. Now show us where you saw the shadows. Were they on that wall beyond the bed, on the opposite side of the nightlight?"

"Yes, zur, that's just where they were; but, Lor', Squoire, I'm like Miss May, I can't make out what you be drivin' at. Ghosties doant come in the daytime."

"No, nurse, but don't you see that if we can pretend that it *isn't* daytime by darkening the window and shutting the door, possibly your midnight visitors may be persuaded to appear. But even by this dim light I can see you don't look as if you would be glad to see them, so just sit between Miss May and me, and we'll all face them together. Now, no more talking please. We will all keep our eyes on that wall, the ghosts playground, you know."

"Oh, Squoire, don't 'e, now!"

"Silence, silence, nurse!"

They had not sat thus for more than a minute when the silence was broken by an alarmed exclamation from the old woman, and a shout of laughter from the two gentlemen and May.

"Oh, zur, why be you all a laffin'? I zeed un again, zur. I zeed un as plain as could be," and the poor old soul sat trembling and with blanched face looking from one to another of her amused companions.

"Now, nurse, I told you that all ghosts can be explained away. Just look at the edge of that saucer. What do you see on it?"

"Why, I sees nowt but a fly, zur."

"Just so. That fly, nurse, or one of the same-family, is the ghost that spoiled your night's rest. As you aptly say, 'nowt but a fly!' Don't you see that the room being in darkness, that little fly is attracted to the solitary light. Do you observe what it is doing?"

"Why yes, zur. It's a walkin' round and round the saucer."

"Yes; and every time it reaches the farther side of the saucer from where we are now sitting, the light behind it causes a shadow, and a *moving* shadow, many times larger than the fly, to be thrown upon the wall beyond the bed. Watch, there it goes round again!"

She watched eagerly, and as conviction forced itself upon her simple mind, she burst into such fits of uncontrollable laughter that her visitors feared the disillusionment might have a worse effect than the previous fright. But the Major, ever alert, blew out the nightlight, whisked up the blind and opened the door, and the sudden flood of daylight had the effect he anticipated of quieting the nervous and somewhat over-wrought old woman.

"Now," called the Major from the garden, "come at once. You see, nurse, you will be responsible if Miss May's cheeks lose their healthy glow. Here you have been delaying her for half-an-hour laying a ghost, while her mother supposes her to be walking in the sunshine!"

"Oh, I be mortal sorry, zur, that I be."

"Well, well, say no more. You know I couldn't be really angry with you, nurse. Good-bye."

Major Woodward was anxious, by close inspection and enquiry, to ascertain whether the great flood was steadily abating, or whether further heavy rains in the distant Welsh mountains and along the upper water-shed were likely to cause another disaster. For disastrous had been the Severn's sudden, indeed unprecedented rise, and it was now all too certain that well-nigh incalculable loss had been occasioned. Towns and villages had been flooded, low-lying houses and outbuildings destroyed, barges and other small craft torn from their moorings and swept out into the Bristol Channel or across miles of flooded flats, to be left high and dry when the great river retired within its limits.

The inundation covered the entire tract bordering upon the river in a course of two hundred and twenty miles, and hundreds of farmers and landowners were faced with the most serious financial straits, if not actual bankruptcy. Many times had the swift deep stream risen in its might above the high enclosing banks, and deluged the country with millions of tons of water. Yet this had been in winter, when these outbreaks were expected—indeed, welcomed, for the flood-water was thick with soil washed from the hills, and left behind it a deposit which enriched the low-lying pasture lands and rejoiced the hearts of tenants, and owners.

But this visitation had been a very different and a very terrible one. In the height of the summer season the raging river had, in the course of twenty-four hours, surmounted its fifteen feet banks and, continuing to rise for five days, had poured irresistibly over the land, carrying down to the sea thousands of tons of hay, also sheep and cattle, as well as trees and portions of hedges. Nor did it stop there, for the protracted rains in the hill district caused the inundation to be

higher than any within living memory, so that the devouring scourge actually reached arable lands which had always been regarded as "out o' floods way." Thus farmers not only lost that year's hay, but root crops and corn fields were devastated, ricks and farm buildings carried away, and in some instances the farmer and his family were for the time homeless.

No wonder the Squire felt and looked anxious; and presently, as, nearing the river, they encountered "Owner" Burgess, as the well-to-do old barge owner was termed in the village, holding the hand of his seven year old grandson, he enquired eagerly if there were any indications of a second rise impending.

"No, Squoire, there beant, thanks be! Zivern is raging along for all the world loike a mill race, but he've got back insoid his banks, he hev. An' long let 'im stop theer, says oi."

"I suppose, Owner," asked Ralph, adopting the local title, "you don't remember many floods like this?"

"Many!" gasped the old man; "whoi, zur, yew may reckon as oi avn't lived 'longside o' Zivern to zee my ninetieth birthday without knowin' zummat about 'ow 'e do behave izself, year in year out. An' oi tell 'e, zur, as oiv'e never zeed two like this 'ere flood afore, that is to zay, never in the zummer, zur. No, nor my vather, nor my grandfather, neither, or I'd a been tould of it, doant 'e zee, zur?"

"Squierie, he do tell me, zur, as yew do come from furrin paarts, wheer, like as not, yew've zeen some strange soights. But I reckon as yew avn't got a river there as can beat ould Zivern."

"Well, that depends upon what you mean by *beating*. In the matter of floods the Severn could easily beat the Murray, our biggest river, in the amount of

financial loss inflicted, because your river runs through towns and villages and there is probably not an acre of unproductive land throughout its entire course. But as to the extent of the inundation the Murray leaves the Severn far behind."

"Lor, zur, 'ow can that be?"

"Why, it is very simple; the length of the Severn, from its source to the Bristol Channel, is two hundred and twenty miles, while that of the Murray is fifteen hundred."

"Oh dear, oh dear; whoi it must be a mighty big country to 'low fer a river o' that length. Yew beant a pullin' o' moi leg, be yew, young zur?"

"Certainly not," laughed Ralph, "Australia is a big country; but then, for all its great size, it is very thinly inhabited. The entire population of the country could be comfortably housed in London, so you will understand that there are millions of square miles of dense forest and of uncultivated land, and when the rivers are in flood, although vast areas may be devastated, no one is a penny the worse off for it. Indeed in some parts, where the rivers run through sheep-grazing country, the Squatters eagerly look forward to the floods as a means of replenishing their reservoirs, for the rainfall is very uncertain and a severe drought means that hundreds of thousands of sheep may die through the disappearance of every blade of grass."

"Well, well, I never could a believed as there was such places. 'Undreds of thousands o' ship! Well! well! But maybe you'll be coming this way again, zur. Oi'll be main pleased to 'av another talk with yew."

"All right, Burgess," said the Major, "I'll see that he comes. Now, Ralph, just coo-ee for May, and let

us be off ; she's gone in to talk to Mrs. Burgess. Hello ! why where is he ? "

For Ralph had suddenly disappeared ; so, too, had the little boy. During the conversation, the Major and the old man had stood with their backs to the river, and now both swung round to see the greyhounds careering to and fro on the bank yelping wildly, while Ralph's straw hat and blazer lay a few feet from the edge, and at once explained where their owner might be found.

CHAPTER VII.

“ Never such a sudden flood,
Upridged so high, and sent on such a charge,
Possessed an inland scene. ”

—Cowper.

“ ZIVERN.”

R EACHING the brink, the two men saw the young Australian a dozen yards away in the rushing stream, while beyond him, but just out of his reach, they caught sight of a white face surrounded by a mass of flaxen hair, as, for the second time, it disappeared in the yellow flood. The old man shrieked, “Ah my lad, my dear lad ! ” and would have fallen to the ground, or possibly into the river itself, had not the Major’s strong arm caught him as he swayed. “Courage, Burgess ! Courage ! ” he cried. “My nephew can swim like an otter. He’ll save the boy. See, he has dived.”

But the Squire knew, all too well, that in that swirling, eddying stream, the diver could gain no assistance from his eyes. Success must depend upon whether his plunge had been so timed that haply his hands might grasp the child’s body somewhere down in that thirty feet of muddy water, upon whose surface they gazed so helplessly. Quite a crowd had now gathered, as it was the village dinner hour, and a great cheer burst from them as, after what seemed an age, Ralph’s head reappeared.

Blood was pouring from his nostrils ; but he dragged a burden in his left hand, then, supporting the inanimate body upon his shoulder, struck out powerfully for the

shore. It was evident that the tremendous force of the current would carry him far below the wharf, and the watchers moved along some seventy yards to a point jutting out into the river, for which the swimmer was evidently making. Even now it might have gone ill with both rescuer and rescued, had not an active and keen-witted young bargee raced out to the extremity of the point with a coil of thin rope and when it became clear that spite of his great strength Ralph would be swept down stream without a chance of working in closer towards the shore, the boatman, yelling “Look out for the line zur,” whirled the coil round above his head and cast it skilfully out towards the swimmer.

A groan burst from the crowd as Ralph was seen to make a clutch at the line and—miss it ! But the young boatman was not to be denied. Rapidly hauling and re-coiling, with a cry to the crowd to stand clear, he swung with a wider sweep, and this time the line actually fell upon the swimmer’s head and shoulders. Instantly grasping and winding it round his wrist, he was hauled swiftly to the bank. Willing hands received the body of the little boy and raced into the inn kitchen, where Ralph himself followed immediately and took charge of the child, only pausing an instant to drink off a stiff glass of brandy which the landlady proffered and his uncle insisted upon his taking. But before he had been at work five minutes, Dr. Roberts, the local practitioner, who had been hurriedly summoned by one of the villagers, entered the room and begged Ralph to go home immediately and change into dry clothes.

“ We’ll bring the little chap round all right, Mr. Grant ; you just scoot as fast as you can go. The run of a mile and a half will probably save you from a bad chill.”

"Yes go, Ralph," said his uncle; "I'll follow with May as soon as we know the child is doing well."

So, obeying the doctor and his uncle, Ralph sprinted for the Hall, and did it so quickly that when the Major and May arrived they found him quite calmly chatting with his aunt, and looking thoroughly well and jolly after a bath, and a good rub down by the ever-useful Ahmed.

To his usual brief grace before meat the Major to-day added a few words of hearty thanksgiving for special mercies. Then, as Mrs. Woodward looked up in puzzled enquiry, his eyes twinkled as he realized that Ralph, with characteristic modesty, had not said a word about the adventure.

"What has happened, dear? I see I needn't feel alarmed, for you are all smiling. But please satisfy my curiosity. I'm eager for news."

"Well, my love, our nephew has been busy making three devoted friends, to wit, old Burgess, his widowed daughter-in-law and his little grandson—the light of his eyes. The old fellow had been expatiating to Ralph on the wonders of "*Zivern*." Ralph, in turn, had astounded him with tales of the mighty *Murray*, and I suppose he was so overcome with amazement that he forgot young master Mischief, who managed to slip away from his grandfather's hand and tumble into the river. Happily, Ralph saw the accident and thought it was a good chance of giving the old man an object lesson, viz., how easily a Colonial, from the banks of the *Murray*, can conquer the *Severn's* most angry moods. That is, of course, a *resume*. You can probably read between the lines. Indeed, I expect my outline will be heavily shaded in within the next

few days, for the story will naturally go the round of the neighbourhood.”

Luncheon over, the two gentlemen returned to their interrupted reading and the ladies joined them in the library, on the understanding that they must be very quiet and not disturb the students.

But the disturbance came from another quarter. The French windows of the library gave on to the lawn, and commanded an uninterrupted view as far as the lodge. The Major, looking up from his reports, caught sight of a carriage entering the drive, and exclaimed “ Why, that the doctor’s brougham. Why on earth doesn’t he use his dogcart on a day like this ? Ralph, run upstairs and get between the blankets ; you’re the only possible invalid of the party.”

The brougham came swiftly up the drive, and the merry quartette stepped out to waylay their visitor before he could reach the porch.

“ Why, Roberts,” cried the Major, as the doctor leaned out to ascertain the meaning of the stoppage, “ are you yourself an invalid, that you must needs use a closed carriage on a summer’s day ? You seemed as hard as nails when we parted an hour ago.”

“ No, Squire,” laughed the doctor, “ there’s little amiss with me beyond the chronic trouble that folks in this locality will not fall ill to oblige me. The rude vigorous health of these Worcestershire people is positively sickening. But the brougham is easily explained,” and, stepping briskly out, he assisted Mrs. George Woodward and the aged rector to alight—“ Now you see ! ”

Instantly the Major, offering his arm to the old lady, led her to a seat on the terrace, while the rector occupied another with the ladies of the house, and the doctor

and Ralph provided themselves with deck chairs, the former quizzically enquiring whether his professional brother were quite sure he had not taken a chill.

" You must wonder at our invasion," said the rector, " but your aunt heard from the maids of Ralph's bravery, and Dr. Roberts very kindly offered to drive us up to see for ourselves that he was none the worse. The doctor happened to be on our side the river seeing a patient and he hastened back and had the brougham waiting at the ferry by the time we had crossed ; you see, with the river so high, we couldn't risk bringing our own carriage over in the boat, and it would have meant fourteen miles to go round by the nearest bridge. Now let me congratulate you, my dear lad, on your plucky rescue. You will, I'm sure, be glad to know that the little chap is pulling round splendidly. The doctor drove us to enquire on the way up."

" Yes," added Mrs. George, " and the dear boy sent a message to you, Ralph. I told him we were coming up to see the gentleman who had saved him from being drowned, and whatever do you think he said ? I'm sure you couldn't guess."

" Then I won't try, Aunt Mary, what was it ? "

" Oh, he's a very practical little fellow, and he said, ' Please mum, would yer ax the gentleman if he'll learn oi to swim ! ' "

" Bravo, youngster," exclaimed the Squire. And " That I will, with pleasure," said his nephew. " When do you think he'll be fit for his first lesson, doctor ? "

" Oh, he'll be all right by the time the river is ready. The water is falling very rapidly now, and in another three days those shallows under the Larry Cliff will be available. You remember there's a fine sandy bottom all along there for quite half a mile, with a depth of

not more than three feet, except in flood time.”

“ Right,” said Ralph, “ then I’ll undertake that the next time that boy falls into ‘ Zivern ’ there shall be no need for anyone to get wet but himself.”

“ Ah,” sighed the rector, “ what a pity that we haven’t a law making the knowledge of swimming compulsory. It is fifty years since I first took charge of this parish, and one shudders to think of the number of cases of drowning during that period. In the old days, before the railway from Bristol to Birmingham was made, the river was the great highway for carriage of goods between the two cities, and this village had a certain importance as a place of call, which it has long ago lost. At that time cases of drowning amongst the bargees were very frequent, for the men would come ashore to the public houses, and were often too intoxicated to get back without accident. And as many skippers had their families on board, there was loss among the children, too. Just think how much of that sacrifice of life was avoidable.”

“ By the way, Uncle George,” said the Squire, with a sly look at his aunt, “ *apropos* of that subject, isn’t there some ancient story about an adventure of a well-known cleric ? ”

“ Now, my dear Marmaduke, do let that old scandal rest. It has done duty for half a century at every dinner-table in the county.”

“ Ah,” cried the doctor, “ do let us have the tale. The rector, by common consent, stands on such a high pinnacle. Ever since I came here, three years ago, I have been hearing his praises both from his own flock and in adjoining parishes. It has really become monotonous. ‘ Twill be quite refreshing to find that, after all, he has ‘ the vices of his virtues.’ ”

"What is this wonderful story, father?" said May.
"From what Uncle George says, one would think it is common talk; but I'm sure I've never heard it. Wouldn't you like to hear it, Ralph? Do say 'yes.'"

"Oh, I'm always glad of a really good yarn. Pray begin, uncle."

"Well, you will please understand," said the Squire, "that the facts"—

"Ah, I hope you'll confine yourself to *facts*," interjected the old clergyman

"The *facts*, I repeat, which I am about to narrate occurred just three years before my birth, so it will be obvious that I cannot speak with the authority of an actual eye-witness; but I am credibly informed by an old man whose veracity"—

"Come, come, Marmaduke, if you are going to tell the story as you had it from Owner Burgess"—

"My dear Uncle George, I must really call you to order," laughed the Squire; "this is your second interruption in as many minutes. When you ascend your pulpit, we all listen with grave respect. No one would dream of audibly disagreeing, even if one dared to differ from your views. Now I claim that you should, in common fairness, accord me equal indulgence. When my tale is finished, this meeting shall be thrown open, and the fullest discussion and severest criticism will be freely permitted."

"Well, well, I suppose you will have your own way," said the rector with a resigned air.

"And now, my friends, we will proceed. You must know that once upon a time a young, newly-ordained clergyman, the younger son of a country squire, left his toilsome duties as curate of an Essex parish in order to take a brief holiday with his people in the West of

England. Now it happened that one of the guests dining at the Hall on the evening of his arrival was the old rector of the parish, whose church stood about a mile and a half away beyond the river which skirted the park. This excellent man was one of the old school of Georgian clergy, now, happily, no longer with us. He figured prominently on the local bench and at quarter sessions, was an enthusiastic horticulturist, a splendid shot, and he donned the pink regularly three days a week during the hunting season. Add to this that he was a noted *bon viveur*, and, finally, that he conducted exactly one service per week—and no more—in his parish church, and you have a fair sample of an old-time country parson. There are scores of stories about him, the narration of which you shall be spared, for *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*, eh Ralph?—you're latest from the schools.

“ Well, to return to that dinner-party at the Hall. This ancient cleric pressed his young reverend brother to preach for him on the following Sunday, and spend the day at the Rectory, and the invitation was accepted. Sunday was glorious, a perfect English summer day. After luncheon the rector and his young friend smoked on the lawn, then strolled round the gardens and greenhouses. The stables, cowsheds, dairy, piggeries kennels, were all inspected in turn, and then their steps turned to the orchard, where the old man pointed out with pride a choice apple tree which had been moved a distance of a hundred yards while in full bloom, and had not only survived, but was covered with fruit.

“ Then at six o'clock came dinner—the function of the day. There had been no suggestion of Sunday school, or children's service—the C.S.S.I. did not exist in those days; besides, any spiritual exercises in the afternoon

would have clashed with the rector's entertainment of his visitor, just as evening service would have been out of the question, as it would have interfered with the Rectory dinner-hour, and the old man prided himself upon being zealously observant of at least one apostolic injunction, in that he was 'given to hospitality.'

"The Rectory cook was noted for her skill. The *menu* was varied, the cellars were well stocked, the meal was prolonged. Now, with dessert, appeared some famous port—very rare and very old—while, you may remember, the guest was very young.

"Of course I do not for a single instant suggest that there was any deliberate intention of wrong-doing on the old man's part; we will say it was only excessive hospitality. But, be that as it may, about half-past eight that Sabbath evening the villagers grouped upon the green, standing at their cottage doors, or gossiping across their garden gates, were shocked and scandalised to see the young clergyman, son of their Squire, who had so ably preached to them that morning, come reeling along the road towards the river, his hat on the back of his head, and singing 'Rule Britannia' at the top of his voice. [Order, order, my dear uncle, I've nearly done.]

"To the older people, all of them his father's tenants, many of them employed on the estate, this amazing exhibition was most distressing; while, alas, the young folks found it highly diverting. Quite a crowd followed the singer until he reached the ferry. The ferryman, being out in his garden behind the cottage, didn't answer the hail of 'Boat!' very promptly. The young man was angered by the delay, especially as he understood, spite of his muddled brain, that he was a laughing-stock to the bucolic assemblage.

“ So, eager to escape, he staggered into the punt, seized a paddle, and, dipping it deeply into the water, threw all his strength into the pull. Unhappily, in his haste, he had omitted to unhook the chain, with the natural result that the punt, darting outwards under the influence of his powerful stroke, was brought up with a sudden jerk when the chain tightened, and the poor parson, discharged as from a catapult, shot head over heels into deep water. He was an expert swimmer, and the involuntary bath having effectually sobered him, he scrambled into the far end of the punt, as the ferryman stepped into the other. Ladies and gentlemen, my story ends there. You will please observe I have mentioned no names.”

The rector had been nervously fidgeting for some time, while the old lady was evidently very much amused.

“ Now, Marmaduke,” began he, “ I will avail myself of your permission to make a few observations. First, it is very evident that you have lived in the East, for you have acquired all the arts of the professional story teller. Whether you have told the tale as you received it from old Burgess, or have added sundry embellishments of your own as the story progressed, I won’t pretend to decide ; but certainly you have made much more of it than I ever heard before ; what do you say, my dear ?”

“ Oh,” laughed Aunt Mary, “ he is clearly a born novelist ; romancing comes quite naturally to him.”

“ Well, Burgess—for I conclude he was your veracious informant—was actually present ; but then you see I was there also, and I will at once state, for the benefit of May, Ralph, and the doctor, that I was that young clergyman, that all those incidents about ‘ Rule Britannia ’ and the following crowd are mere creations

of my nephew's imaginative brain. But that which was all too true was that, like a young fool, I allowed my kind host to persuade me that his wine, by reason of its great age, could not possibly affect my head. On going out into the air I realised at once that I had been unwise, and by the time the ferry was reached I was distinctly muddleheaded. The tumble overboard occurred exactly as related ; but instead of there being a jeering group of villagers, there was actually no one in sight save Burgess on this side of the river and the ferryman on the other. And, if I may be allowed to supplement the narrative, let me say to you that two strong influences were wrought in my life by the events of that day. *First*, not one drop of intoxicating liquor has passed my lips since I drank those four glasses of port, just fifty-one years ago this month ; *second*, when a year later I was myself presented to the living, upon the death of the former rector, I determined by the grace of God, that the Lord's Day should witness at least three services in the parish church, and, as far as I remember, there has been daily morning prayer in church, without a single break, during the entire half-century."

" Yes, indeed, Uncle George," said the Squire, " we all know what is done, and we thankfully appreciate our privileges. May you long be spared to continue the good work."

" Ah, my dear Marmaduke, I am seventy-seven years old, and it cannot be said of me, ' His eye was not dim nor his natural force abated.' Indeed, as I drag my tired limbs up the pulpit steps, I often think of the passage, ' He shall be afraid of that which is high.' But it is the Master's work, and He will not suffer it to languish. Of that I feel assured."

“ Well, sir,” broke in the doctor, “ you may feel weary as you ascend the pulpit, but you certainly contrive to prevent your hearers sharing your fatigue. For my own part, I may say that I have sometimes entered the church after a broken night’s rest, and have found great difficulty in keeping awake through the service ; but then has come the sermon, and it has galvanized me back to alert wakefulness.”

“ Thank you, Roberts ; I am cheered by your words.”

“ Now,” said the doctor, “ as the Squire has set the example, perhaps I may tell a short story. I had it from my father, who held a country practice in Lancashire, in a district where there was a parson of the Squire’s ‘ Georgian ’ type. On the occasion of a sale of the furniture and effects of the deceased vicar, my father drove over to inspect, with a view to picking up some bargains. Accompanied by the vicarage coachman-gardener, he noticed, in passing through the yard, an ancient barrel churn, and, looking inside, found it half-filled with manuscript sermons.

“ ‘ Why, what does this mean, James ? ’ said he.

“ ‘ Mane, doctor, whoi it manes as th’owd gaffer ’ad been a preachin’ so mony years as he’d clane lost count o’ what he’d tould us fr’ th’ pulpit. So one day he up an’ pitches th’ whole lot o’ sermons inter th’ owd churn, an’ then every Sunday mornin, reglar, he’d saay, ‘ Now, Jim, lad, yow joost go an’ give a couple o’ turns ter th’ churn ’andle, an’ bring along th’ sermon as comes out atop.’ ”

“ Ah, that is a very amusing tale, doctor,” said the rector ; “ but I can really assure you that I don’t keep an old churn for such a purpose. And that reminds me, Ralph, of something I wanted to ask you. I understand your friend Carew is coming down on

Saturday. Do you think he would preach for me on Sunday, say, at the evening service?"

"Well, Uncle George, he's been terribly run-down through overwork in the East End; but since the evening sermon will be preached from your open-air pulpit, I feel sure he will do what you wish. Indeed, it will probably do him real good, physically; what do you say, doctor?"

"I share the opinion of my young professional friend," laughed the local medico, himself only two years Ralph's senior. "And now, rector, I'll leave the brougham to take you and Mrs. Woodward back to the ferry, but I must be going, as I have several calls to make."

"By no means, Dr. Roberts," exclaimed the old lady, "we are quite ready; we'll go with you at once."

CHAPTER VIII.

" And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill ;
But oh for the touch of the vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still !

Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O Sea !
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me."

—Tennyson.

PAWSHUR.

CAREW arrived the following Saturday. Ralph, his bosom friend, knew beforehand that his relatives would accord him a warm welcome, but even he was not prepared for the whole-hearted surrender of the Woodward family to the charms of Carew's personality. Unfortunately the visit was brief. He was of course under promise to stay with his widowed mother in Devonshire before leaving for Australia, and he had felt compelled to limit the days spent in Worcestershire to six.

The whole party walked over to the Rectory in the afternoon, and it resulted from this call that Carew not only assisted at the early service on the following day, but preached both morning and evening, on the latter occasion from the open-air pulpit, when the crowded congregation, altogether too numerous for the seating accommodation in church, proved by their unflagging attention how deeply they were impressed by the earnest eloquence of the preacher, who, at the close of his sermon, pointing towards the distant Malvern

range, exclaimed, " Could I stand on the highest summit of yonder hills, and my voice be heard to the utmost limit of your county, I would cry aloud the words of my text, ' This Man receiveth sinners ! ' God grant that every one present here to-night may thus be received of Him ! "

The aged rector warmly grasped his hand at parting, saying, " May God bless you, my brother, and ever keep your spirit as fresh and bright and your heart as full of Christ as it is to-day. I am an old man, and my course is nearly run, but I say to you, from an experience of many years, the Master we both serve is worthy of all our devotion. I have proved that earth can afford no joy or attraction whatever to compare for a single instant with the attractiveness of our divine Lord and the joy of leading some soul to Him. I often repeat those words of Samuel Rutherford :

' If but *one* soul from Anwoth meet me at God's right hand,

My heaven will be *two* heavens in Immanuel's land.' Good-bye, and many thanks for your willing help."

The weather continued fine, and each day was well filled. The programme had been carefully pre-arranged, and it was clear that the guest thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated the entertainment provided for him. On Monday they all drove to Malvern, and sending the carriage on to meet them at Ledbury, they mounted the North hill and passed from summit to summit along the crest of the range. Favoured with perfect conditions, they saw distinctly the towers of Worcester, Hereford, and Gloucester cathedrals, and of Tewkesbury Abbey, the bold uprising Wrekin, the distant Brecon Beacons and Black Mountain, the long line of the Cotswolds, and finally the faint shimmer of sunlight

upon the far-off waters of the Severn estuary, flanked by the highlands of the Forest of Dean. An *al fresco* luncheon on the hills was followed by an inspection of the British camp, the interesting old parish church at Ledbury, and a charming drive home to dinner by a road skirting Eastnor Castle.

Tuesday was devoted to a delightful water trip in the squire's steam launch to Worcester, and on to Holt Fleet, where luncheon was served in the picturesque gardens of the old inn, and after roaming for a couple of hours amid some of the most delightful scenery in England, the party re-embarked for the twenty-mile run home.

On Wednesday morning, by previous arrangement, the two friends called for the boy Burgess when going for their early dip, and the little chap's first swimming lesson was a great success, so great, indeed, that after one more he was able to go alone, and thenceforward if ever that boy chanced to be missing it was concluded that he had gone for a "swim in Zivern."

After breakfast the three gentlemen and May walked to Tewkesbury, and Ralph was quick to observe how very little they used the high road, the seven or eight miles being accomplished almost entirely through a series of short cuts by footpath across fields and through coppices, even in one or two instances traversing a farmyard.

"Yes," responded Major Woodward, when Ralph remarked upon this feature, "it is an easy and certainly a very pleasant mode of covering the ground, and as to accounting for it, well we must, I fancy, revert to 'the spacious times of great Elizabeth' for its origin. Unless my history is at fault it was in her reign that a stringent law was passed making church attendance

obligatory upon all her majesty's lieges, and as this would entail a certain amount of hardship upon a scattered rural population, they were permitted to make a straight path to the church, regardless of the rights of private ownership. This morning we are benefiting by that saving clause in the Act of three hundred years ago.

" You see, Carew," added the Squire playfully, " I'm anxious that my nephew should not return to his native land under the impression that all England is as flat as the country round Cambridge, though I daresay he learned that when you had him staying in Devonshire."

" Oh yes, he found plenty of hilly country there, and you must remember we have done Scotland together very thoroughly."

" True ; perhaps I should have been more accurate in saying that I am especially concerned as to his opinion about Worcestershire, his mother's native county. We are proud of our scenery, I can assure you."

" And rightly so," said Ralph ; " mother has of course many a time talked to me of the charms of her old home, but really, uncle, I was not prepared—as I have told you more than once when staying here—for such variety of hill, woodland and river as this. It is quite captivatingly beautiful, and you are fortunate in having this eminence upon your own property from which to get such a gloriously extensive panorama."

" Bravo ! " chimed in May. " The expression is not a whit too strong. I love to come up here : one could sit for hours looking round upon all the beauties ; I never tire of it."

" Well, my child," said her father, jumping up from the grass on which he had been sitting, " I share your

feelings, but I'm afraid your mother will tire of waiting if she drives in to Tewkesbury to pick us up and finds we are not ready. So come along."

Standing an hour later upon the famous battle-field, they gazed upon those grand old walls, that massive tower, which had looked down upon the fierce struggle, and under whose shadow the poor young Prince had been struck down by the murderous dagger of the Duke of Clarence.

Then the carriage arrived, and they accompanied Mrs. Woodward to Cheltenham, whence, after luncheon at the "Plough" and a visit to the Pump Room, the return drive was commenced, *via* Bredon hill, to Pershore.

Here they were expected at the Vicarage, and all were glad to be shown over the ancient Priory Church, their genial host sparing no pains to make their visit a memorable one to them all. The good Canon had earned far more than local renown as an archæologist, and naturally took especial delight in unfolding the history of his own church and parish.

Carew's antiquarian soul was vastly pleased with the marvellous series of stained glass windows, each bearing at foot a quaint legend of olden times. As for Ralph, although he had seen and heard it all upon a previous occasion, he assured their cicerone that to him, coming from a land without a history, where a whole continent had lain fallow for thousands of years, peopled only by savages, and where the oldest building only dated back to 1788, there would always be intense fascination in these records of stirring times and memories of the workers and warriors of other days.

While taking tea on the Vicarage lawn, they listened with deep interest to the stories which their host told so charmingly, stories with that strong local colouring

which he was so well qualified to supply, inasmuch as his extensive knowledge of Worcestershire folk-lore made him a recognized authority on the subject.

"I suppose, Major Woodward," said he, "you have told your nephew and his friend about the once famous Pershore Fair?"

"No, Canon, I don't think my uncle has ever spoken of it," said Ralph. "Please tell us: all your stories are new and all of such good quality. You've already given us material for quite a bulky volume. This part of my journal will be of thrilling interest."

"Well, Pershore, as you've learned, was a place of considerable note ecclesiastically in mediæval days. But this was not all, for the town, from very distant times, was an important centre for agricultural and commercial transactions affecting the midland counties and Wales. Pershore Fayre figures in ancient legal documents and records, and this little town was at one time the gathering place, in the month of June, for thousands of farmers, market gardeners, drovers, dealers, hucksters, and gipsies; while the peasantry within a radius of fifty miles flocked hither on foot to attend the fair.

"Not the least interesting fact in connection with this great annual function was its frequent mention in the many songs and couplets which in pre-education days did duty for the Primer, the Calendar and the Year Book of to-day. For example, in order to fasten a fact in natural history upon a child's memory, he would be taught that

'The cuckoo comes in April,
The cuckoo sings in May,
He buys a horse at Pawshur Fayre,
And then he rides away.'

"A market gardener could probably neither read nor write, but his memory retained the couplet, learnt in his childhood,

' When elm leaves at Pawshur are big as fardens,
It's time to plant kidney beans in the gardens.'

" To many thousands Pershore was a sort of Mecca, to which they once a year made pilgrimage. A countryman would meet another on the road and enquire, ' Well, Jarge, an' 'ow be yew ? ' ' O, oi be pretty pure an' 'earty, thanks be : an' 'ow's yersel ? ' ' O, oi be bobbish thank ye, an' ow's Meary an' the chillun ? ' ' O, they be all the same owd fettle as uzhull : an' 'ow's things a lookin' in yore paarts ; an' whar be yew agwine tew ? ' ' Whar be oi agwine tew, did yer saay ? Why Pawshur, whar d'yer think ? '

" But if the season were bad, the crops poor, the cattle diseased and the farmers and market gardeners disheartened, then the reply to the stereotyped question ' Whar be yew a gwine tew ? ' would be, in doleful tones, ' Pawshur, God help us ! ' These phrases are still in common use. Only this morning my gardener, drawing my attention to the heavy load of fruit on the trees, said, ' It's Pawshur whar d'yer think, *this* year, zur, beant it ? '

" There are many other quaint but forcible colloquialisms with which I won't trouble you now ; but if you, Mr. Grant, would like to have some for your journal I shall be pleased to jot them down and post them to you."

" That is a most kind offer, which I gratefully accept," said Ralph. " I suppose Pershore is included in the great Worcestershire market-gardening district ? "

" Dear me, yes ! Why the famous egg plums, which are sent from this county to all the great towns, are

known as Pershore plums. You really quite shock me by the implied doubt as to whether we are in the gardening district. I assure you we consider ourselves a very important part of it. Why my old gardener prides himself on being 'Pawshur born an' bred,' and holds, against all comers, that Pershore methods are superior to any which find favour elsewhere. The other day he greatly amused me by telling with much indignation how a tourist, watching from the church-yard his deft use of the local double hoe, an invaluable tool for earthing up potatoes, somewhat impertinently took him to task. 'Well,' said I, 'what did you say to him?' 'Whoi zur, oi zaid to un as 'ow oi knawed 'ow ter 'oe taaters afore 'e were barn!'"

"I should have liked a chat with him, if there had been time," said Carew.

"Yes, you would have found him both interesting and amusing, for he is quite a noted character, and boasts a marvellous memory. I'm obliged to be very discreet, for he was gardener to two of my predecessors, and doesn't hesitate to quote them as patterns for my conduct. I assure you it is a most serious matter to have a servant whose table of precedents dates back to the 'thirties! You have probably all heard of the parish that was ruled by a *rector*, a *director* and a *misdirector*—in other words, by the parson and his wife and daughter; but that was nothing to having the parson under the thumb of his gardener."

"Surely he's not quite as bad as you paint him," said May. "He has always seemed to me such an old dear, so nice and courteous."

"Oh, by all means," laughed the Vicar. "He can be both nice and courteous. But had his lot been cast in the navy they would have dubbed him a 'sea

lawyer.' The parson and the doctor are his special butts. Why, last week he warmly reproved Dr. Roberts for presuming to enquire after his rheumatism. 'It beant rheumatism wots the matter wi' oi, doctor. No zur, it be roomatticks wots wrong along of oi. That be a zight-wuss nor rheumatism, it be. An' we've 'ad such abundations of water in the housen along o' these 'ere floods, as oi've 'ad it wuss nor ever oi hev. Zo bad oi've bin as oi could noither zit nor ztand,' "

" Well, we've been sitting quite too long, I'm afraid, Canon," said Mrs. Woodward, as soon as the general laughter had subsided. Now, when are you coming over to see us? Come and dine to-morrow night if you're free. Mr. Carew is leaving us on Friday morning."

" I'm quite disengaged," responded the Vicar heartily, " and shall be very pleased to come. By the way, is it true that Sir John Kynnersley is at home again? I heard a rumour of it."

" Quite true, I believe," said the Major; " we are thinking of riding in his direction to-morrow, and shall certainly call. I'm anxious for my nephew to meet him before he returns to Australia. Now good-bye, and thanks from us all. We shall want some more of your stories to-morrow night, remember!"

" Au revoir! My greetings to your uncle George and Mrs. Woodward!"

The last day of Carew's visit was full of incidents, some of which were destined to be remembered in the coming time.

It had been arranged that as the Squire would be occupied until luncheon upon magisterial matters, May and the two visitors should spend the morning on the river in a pair-oared boat, but just as they were moving off across the park the sound of wheels was

heard behind them and Dr. Roberts' dogcart dashed up at a great pace, the doctor himself hailing and gesticulating to attract attention.

"I want Dr. Grant," he cried when within hearing, and when Ralph rejoined the others he said hurriedly, "You two will have to take the oars and get a man to steer. I must slip out of these flannels and go with Roberts."

"Is it something very serious?" asked May as Ralph ran back to the house.

"I trust not *now*," said the doctor, "it is an operation, some miles away, one of those cases in which a second surgeon may make all the difference between success and failure, and I'm greatly relieved to have your cousin's assistance."

In a few minutes the two professional men were speeding on their errand, while the others, on reaching the river, adopting Ralph's suggestion, installed the boat-keeper as steersman and greatly enjoyed their two hours' spin, May's expert oarsmanship eliciting warm praise from the 'Varsity Blue.

All met at luncheon, when the Squire casually enquired of Ralph where he had spent the morning, as he did not appear to have been boating.

"Oh, I took a drive with Roberts, he wanted to talk shop."

"I see. I suppose if he happened to want any assistance at a particular case he took his groom to the bedside, while you stood at the horse's head. You deceiver, your reticence is useless, for I met Roberts on my way home, and he told me the whole story. Wanted to talk shop indeed! He tells me that he gathered from that 'shoppy' talk, as you drove out, that you were vastly more up-to-date than he, that

your London Hopsital experience had been largely in this particular class of case—in short, he announced you at the house as a London specialist who would perform the operation, and he himself played second fiddle throughout. Yes, I heard you ask for another cutlet, but I meant to have my say without interruption. Now you can have as many cutlets as you like ; you'll need them if Roberts tells his tale at the next gathering of the county medicos, for they'll all want to call in the eminent London specialist."

"Ah, uncle," laughed Ralph, "you were always a tease. Happily I shall be on my way home before Roberts meets his *confrères*."

* * * * *

"Sir John left home this morning, sir," was the footman's answer as he opened the door to the Squire's ring ; "but if the young lady and yourselves will please to come in, I'll have the horses sent round. I'm sure Mrs. Webster wouldn't like you to go back without tea being served."

So May and the three gentlemen dismounted and were conveyed to the drawing-room, where Mrs. Webster, Sir John's housekeeper, presently appeared, and learning the Squire's deep disappointment at missing his old friend, explained that the General had gone to Tunbridge Wells, and after leaving there would be travelling for a long time—indeed, for so long that he had actually left no address with her, but said that all letters were to be forwarded to his lawyers. Would the young lady and the gentlemen like to see over the house ? "

They would, very much, for Kynnersley Court was one of the show places of the county. So nearly an hour was pleasantly spent in the picture gallery, and in

passing through many rooms where ancient and modern curios and *objets d'art* were lavishly displayed. Last of all they were shown into Sir John's study, and here the housekeeper, with bated breath, drawing aside a curtain over the mantelpiece, said, "There, you see that handsome carved door? That covers my lady's portrait. Sir John keeps the key on his bunch, and no one is ever allowed to see what is within. Poor dear gentleman, he has never got over the blow of losing her."

"By the way, Ralph," said Major Woodward, "you recollect having heard that my old comrade Captain Barton came into this property on the death of a maternal uncle, a condition of inheritance being that he assumed the name of Kynnersley. He had only been married a short time when the border war broke out, and he, being anxious for active service, exchanged into my regiment, sending his wife home, or rather arranging with friends in Calcutta to see her on board the *Cygnet* for England. The vessel was never heard of after leaving Calcutta, and the poor bereaved husband has devoted himself to his profession, but everyone who knows him realizes that he is a broken-hearted man. I have sat in this room with him many a time, but he has never, as Mrs. Webster has already told you, offered to show me the portrait which that door conceals, nor has he once mentioned his loss in my hearing."

"No, sir," said his housekeeper, "Sir John is the kindest and most considerate of masters, everybody likes him, but to no one does he ever seem to open his heart. It's terribly sad, and we all pray that God will comfort him, poor gentleman."

After tea on the terrace, the visitors remounted, but

it was some time before they recovered their spirits, for all were saddened by the details to which they had listened, though to the Squire and his daughter it was a familiar story.

"I'm awfully sorry you've missed the General," said May at last. "Although you soon discover that he is nursing some private grief, yet he can be very genial. I've always been fond of him. However, Ralph, I shan't be a bit surprised if you turn up here again within a year or two, and then you may make Sir John's acquaintance."

"What!" said Ralph, "come back here so soon after being away from home for eight long years. What can you be thinking of?"

"Well, we shall see," cried the girl; and then they broke into a canter.

There were several guests at dinner that evening. Afterwards, in the drawing-room, one of Major Woodward's thrilling Indian experiences was being succeeded by an exquisite duet on piano and harp, when the butler burst excitedly into the room saying he had noticed two strange men moving in the bushes bordering the lawn on the left of the house. Calling the other men to follow, the Squire, without waiting for weapons, sprang through one of the open windows and dashed precipitately into the shrubbery. A moment later there was an exclamation, coupled with the sound of a fall and of retreating footsteps.

"After them, Ralph!" cried his uncle from the ground. "The scoundrels have stretched a wire across the lawn to trip us."

Immediately afterwards a peal of laughter from Ralph, and the words, "Here are your burglars, uncle," proclaimed an unexpected termination of the pursuit.

And the others on joining him, found, instead of a couple of lawless ruffians, two innocent colts, which, squeezing through a gap in the park fencing, had after the manner of their kind been inquisitively listening to the music. The supposed wire by which the Squire had been ignominiously floored proved to be an extra stout bramble, and the only damage beyond a severe shaking was a scarified patent leather boot, which the gallant Major laughingly declared was an honourable scar to be proudly worn in memory of the evening's alarm.

CHAPTER IX.

"The joys of meeting pay the pangs of absence,
else who could bear it?"

—Rowe.

AFTER MANY YEARS.

THE arrival of the mail at an up-country station is an event of considerable importance, and when Mick's stentorian "coo-eh" woke the echoes and set all the dogs barking one wet evening early in August, and that merry Celt was seen galloping in under a heavy burden, a crowd speedily gathered.

Mr. and Mrs. Grant and Enid had just finished dinner, and hearing the hail and the clattering hoof beats they promptly left the table and awaited the mail on the verandah.

"There's a power av letters, yer honour," cried Mick, as he reined in his smoking steed at the steps, "and its mesilf as hopes they'll all be bringin' good news to yerselves and the young mistress."

"Thanks, Mick, for your kind wishes," said Mr. Grant; "just hand the bags over, and then be off and see what Kitty has got for her husband's supper, for I expect you're pretty sharp set after your twenty-five miles ride in the rain."

"Thru for ye, sorr, oi'm just that. Well, here's the bags, sorr, an' oi'll be takin' yer honour's advice,"

"So do, Mick, but first tell me how poor Wilson is going on, and whether there is any chance of the regular mail-cart service being resumed soon"—for there had been an interruption of the service by reason of the

floods, and Wilson the mail driver was laid up with an attack of pleurisy, the result of repeated soakings.

"Indade, yer honour, he's bin mortal bad. His poor young woife is clane worn out wid nursin' av 'im, daacent woman. She tould me as he was quite in a state av como last noight, an' she sent off her eldest gurl, purty craythur, for Dr. Gordon. Well, yer honour, what did the ould docthor do when he reached the house but just turn round on her and order her aff to bed! 'Como indade!' said he, 'its good sound nateral slape yer husband's enyin', an' if ye don't get off wid yer daughter an' get some av the same yersilf, oi'll be 'avin' ye on my 'ands as well yer man.' And no sooner had she gone than the ould gentleman set himsilf down by Wilson's bed, an' there she found 'im this blessed mornin' whin she got up to light her kitchen fire."

"Capital, Mick, that's good news. Now away you go to supper."

Not a moment was lost in breaking the seals of the great sack of letters and emptying its contents upon a large table in the verandah to be sorted by Mrs. Grant and Enid, while a few yards away Mr. Grant and the manager made a simultaneous attack upon two sacks of newspapers.

Several minutes' diligent sorting sufficed to evolve order from the chaotic mass of correspondence, when it was found that no fewer than seventy-two residents on the station were entitled to participate in the distribution.

No sooner had Mr. Webb departed with the whole of the letters and papers pertaining to his department, than Enid exclaimed, "Daddy, the English mail is in, for 'here's a letter from Ralph amongst yours. Do

let us hear his news at once and find whether he is really coming home this year."

"Very well, my bairn," said the Squatter, "my inclination jumps with yours, spite of there being several important business letters upon which I must see Mr. Webb before he leaves, so let us go to the drawing-room at once, for your mother ought to be resting indoors this damp evening, then you can read Ralph's letter aloud to us."

When Mr. Grant had seen his wife comfortably ensconced on a sofa and planted himself in an easy chair, Enid took her favourite seat on a footstool beside him, and was about to cut the envelope when her eye was arrested by the postmark, "Ventnor, July 8, 18—" and the brief endorsement "Posted by the Pilot."

"Why," she cried, "he must have been on his way when this was posted; but surely he can't have come by the mail boat, or he and his letter would have arrived together."

"Suppose," said the Squatter, "that instead of speculating over a closed envelope, you proceed to open it and discover what the letter can tell us on the point."

"Most true, my wise daddy," laughed the girl, "my wits for the moment had gone wool-gathering," and then, as the Squatter and his wife exchanged a significant glance over her bowed head, she read:

"Cambridge, 1st July, 18—.

"My dear parents and little Enid [here Mr. Grant gave an amused chuckle as he looked at the tall girl beside him], when this letter reaches you I shall probably be well on my way towards the Antipodes.

"The past few months have been a great grind, but happily all has ended as I wished, and you must be prepared to treat me with the respect to which a

formidable string of capital letters entitles me. And permit me to add that I am very much at your service should you require my professional aid, though I earnestly hope dear mother is getting quite strong again and that the other members of the home trio are in robust health. Judging from the last news you sent me there is little ground for uneasiness.

" It is needless to say how ardently I long to get back to you, now that all is accomplished for which I came to England, and it is difficult to restrain myself from taking passage in the next mail steamer so as to be with you as quickly as possible. However, I must curb my impatience, as Sir Andrew Clark, who has been very good to me at the London Hospital, advises my making the voyage by sailing ship. Don't be alarmed, there is nothing whatever the matter with me, only I'm a little pulled down by the strain of recent work.

" So I have applied for and obtained the post of hon. surgeon on the *Wombat*, a fine full-rigged ship bound for Cape Town and Australian ports, and due to leave the Thames next week.

" You have heard so much from me about my old college chum Carew, that you must almost think of him as an acquaintance. He was ordained to priest's orders on Trinity Sunday, after two years' very hard experience as an East End curate, and his friends all urged him to take a sea voyage before settling down again to parochial work. Against this he rebelled, declaring that the strain would not be at all too much for him.

" However, when his mother wrote to me confidentially, I got him to call on me at the Hospital at a time when I knew Sir Andrew would be there. He very kindly saw Carew at my request and effectually disposed of all his scruples. ' My dear young friend,'

said he, ' it is your greatest wish to do all the good you can in the world—in a word, to be an efficient servant of your Divine Master.' ' Certainly, said' Carew, ' that is my desire.' ' Well, then,' said the physician, ' I also seek to serve the same Master, and with a full sense of my responsibility to Him I bid you take a long rest, and, if possible, a long voyage. I have already advised your friend Dr. Grant to go home by sailing ship, and you could not do better than join him. Believe me, you have drawn far too heavily upon your reserve, and your subsequent work will be all the more efficient by reason of thorough recuperation of exhausted energy.'

" When Carew came on to my rooms and reported the interview, you may be sure I promptly clinched the nail Sir Andrew had driven home by cordially inviting him in your name to visit us at Bannockburn. And so the matter is settled, and the parson and the doctor are to share a cabin on board the *Wombat*. I'm certain, dear father, you won't feel vexed with me for having given this invitation. Gerald Carew is a splendid fellow, and I am sure you will take to him at once. [' Dear lad,' exclaimed Mr. Grant, ' he knows his father well enough to feel quite easy on that score. The doors of Bannockburn will always be open to any friend of Ralph's.] He was a great power for good at Cambridge," continued the reader, " and a hearty and acceptable helper in the various efforts put forth by the Principal of Ridley Hall and others to enlist the men's interest in foreign missions. Carew's thoughts have been much turned towards China for some time past, especially since reading the story of that saintly medico Harold Schofield.* We read the book together

* "*Memorials of R. H. A. Schofield,*" by Dr. A. T. Schofield, London. Hodder & Stoughton.

during the summer trip we had last year, making our headquarters with Carew's people in Devonshire, a delightful jaunt of which, however, I wrote a full account at the time. During our long tramps we carried the book with us and took turns in reading aloud. Schofield was a most brilliant scholar and did splendidly at Oxford and Bart's. There can be no doubt he would have risen to highest eminence in his profession had he remained in this country. But he was before all things a *Christian*, and to him, where the claims and commands of Christ were concerned, every other consideration was of secondary importance. He deemed it his highest possible privilege and honour to lay all his great attainments at the feet of his Saviour, and consecrate his life to medical mission enterprise in a Chinese city, and after brief years of strenuous work he was called to his reward. Some have not hesitated to speak of this valuable life as thrown away, but no one reading his life story and realizing his ideals can entertain such a belief. Moreover, the best answer to the objectors lies in the direct and tremendous impetus given to missionary effort in China through Schofield's example and testimony, and one cannot but feel that the very pathos of this grand career so tragically cut short in the midst of success has been a powerful incentive to many to volunteer for the foreign mission field. But I forgot that possibly you have read the book and are familiar with all I have been saying.

" You see this letter is dated from Cambridge. I ran up here for one night just to say good-bye to any of my quondam friends who might happen to be here during vacation. Carew has been promptly and very kindly liberated by his vicar, and has hied him to Devonshire

to bid good-bye to his people, after spending a week with me at River Hills, where he made a great impression.

"I will keep my letter open so as to give you the latest news before we finally leave England. Now, good-night. If our voyage be prosperous you may expect to hear of the *Wombat* in Port Adelaide about the second week in October. So in any case we shall (D.V.) spend Christmas at Bannockburn. *Au revoir.* Love to you all.—Your affectionate son,

Ralph Grant.

P.S.—Off the Isle of Wight. July 8th. Just one last word of greeting before the pilot goes ashore. We are now fairly started, with glorious summer weather and the wind just from the quarter our good captain desires.—R.G."

Mrs. Grant was the first to break the brief silence which followed the reading of Ralph's letter. "This is indeed good news at last," said she. "They have already been at sea a whole month, and we have only two months more to wait before welcoming our boy and his friend. They will be here for the consecration of the church after all. And if Marmaduke and Barbara come as we suggested, bringing May, we shall make quite a family muster. It will be a pleasant surprise to Ralph and his friend to find that the River Hills party are coming."

"Yes, it will be a happy gathering," said her husband, "and now, my love, don't you think you ought to be getting off to roost? You must be tired, and I daresay the letter has over-excited you."

"No, indeed, it has done me very real good. I feel stronger this evening than I have for months, and I should like to stay up for prayers."

"Very well," said the Squatter, "if you really are sure it won't overtax you. What do you think, Enid?"

"I think mother knows best, daddy dear. Ah, what does Ah Fang want?"—for the celestial appeared that moment in the doorway.

"If you please, sare," said he, "Mr. Webb muchee want speak to you before he go. And, sare, please every one want to know if Mas'r Ralph coming home."

"Very well," replied his master, "I'll be out in a moment. Now Enid, my bairn, what were you going to say?"

"Only this, daddy, I have a letter from Helen Tennant; would you and mother mind my asking her to come over and make a long stay with me? You know we haven't met since the last Adelaide visit."

"Certainly," replied the Squatter heartily, "and let your mother enclose a note to Mrs. Tennant asking her and her husband to come, too. It would be a pleasure to have them. And now I must be off to see Webb, for, as Mick would say, I've 'a power o' work' to get through."

Three minutes later a resounding cheer was heard as Mr. Grant announced to the crowd of station hands who had ridden in for letters the welcome news that his long absent son was indeed coming home at last.

When the Squatter rejoined the ladies he laughingly assured Enid that her housewifely cares would be diminished, for the reason of the mysterious shortage of eggs, which had for several weeks caused serious inconvenience to the cook, had at last been detected.

Many minds had been exercised as to the reason why the large colony of laying hens, kept under most suitable conditions for the supply of eggs to the house, should have signally failed in justifying their existence

and the care expended upon them. The manager had caused new padlocks to be placed upon the houses, and dogs had been specially chained at the doors every night, but so far without any result save to spoil the sleep of the Webb household, for the dogs, not appreciating their quarters, made night hideous by their continuous and dismal howling.

But at last it occurred to the manager to do what should have been done in the first instance, namely, treat a purely native phenomenon as demanding solution by the skilled native mind. So Jacky and Billy were called into consultation. The case having been fully stated to them, they examined the hen-roosts, then turned to one another and grinned a grin which seemed to say, "Oh, these white fellows, how simple they are!" This done, Jacky turned to the manager, saying, "Mas'r Webb take plenty care all round, but no care on top."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Jacky mean that de thief who steal de eggs don't mind padlcoks, don't mind dogs, don't mind wire netting all round outside, cause Mas'r Webb so kind to leabe de top open to de sky, no wire netting dere at all."

"I see; then you think the eggs are stolen by birds?"

"Quite sure, Mas'r Webb. Eggs am stolen by de crows."

And so it proved, for very early the following morning the manager was fetched from his bed by Jacky, and arrived in time to see a procession of crows, a dozen or more, soaring upwards from the fowl yards and making off across the Murray, each with an egg impaled upon his beak!

No time was lost in applying an effective remedy. Before evening every yard had been roofed in with

wire netting, and the next flock of sable burglars had to fly away checkmated.

"These Australian crows," said the Squatter, "are certainly very knowing birds. Webb tells me that on some of the outlying lands where he has lately been putting grain, the cockatoos have come down in thousands and practically pecked up the whole sowing. So to deal effectually with the marauders he has made extensive broadcastings of wheat soaked in strychnine. Down came the cockatoos as before, but crows came too, only with this marked difference of method, that while the cockatoos went straight for the poisoned grain, the crows formed a great circle round the field and calmly looked on. But the moment the cockatoos began to feel the effects of the dose, the black watchers pounced upon them, tearing them to pieces, without even having the good taste to await dissolution!"

Mr. Grant's nervous apprehension as to his wife was needless. There had already, as the doctor predicted, been steady progress, but from the day Ralph's letter reached Bannockburn it became evident that the one tonic most needed had at last been administered. The mother's heart-ache being exchanged for the certain hope of speedily seeing once more the son who had been absent from her nearly one-third of his life, lassitude and languor disappeared as by magic, and the old-time activities were resumed without apparent effort.

The next English mail brought letters from River Hills, bearing date July 17th. Mrs. Woodward wrote: "My dear Lilian,—Your letters came on the 12th, just five days after Ralph and his friend had sailed. The result of our family conclave upon your invitation is that we gladly accept it, and you may expect us by

the steamer leaving England on the 19th of September. We have not met since our long visit to Bannockburn nearly fifteen years ago, and you have never seen May at all ! Of course you know that Marmaduke and I have long hoped that Aleck would bring you and Enid over here during Ralph's residence in the old country, but he appears to be so wedded to his home in the new land that we conclude it is a case of Mahomet coming to the mountain, if we are to meet again."

The Major wrote to his brother-in-law, " You old limpet, you don't deserve the great favour we are bestowing upon you. By every rule you ought long ago to have come to us, both to give Lilian a chance of revisiting her old home and renewing the acquaintance of her many friends, and also to introduce Enid into English society. Of course after Lilian's illness, and with Ralph just reaching home again, it is out of the question that you should leave Australia, but you must really tear yourself away and return with us for a long stay at River Hills after our visit to Bannockburn. With Ralph at home as ' boss '—to quote a favourite colonial expression—your well-worn excuse of inability to leave your numerous interests unguarded will no longer serve, so make up your mind to the inevitable, for we won't return without you. And while I'm on the subject, let me just add that you will find your son's mental powers as great in proportion as his muscular development. His quick grasp of new ideas and his mastery of detail will astonish you."

Then came Enid's portion. May wrote to her : " We're really going to meet at last, you and I ! It was so good of you to enclose your portrait in your last letter, for although we've corresponded so long, I've only been able to construct a mental picture from

very meagre materials. Father and mother have of course always spoken of you as they knew you, a child of four, and Ralph's description, while very enthusiastic, applied rather to a maiden of fifteen, according to our English standard of development, than to a girl of the eleven or twelve years which you boasted at the time he left for England.

" He told me lots of stories of your prowess as a horsewoman and a whip, of your expert angling and skill with a rifle, of your great speed in swimming and graceful ease in diving, and finally of your clever handling of an oar and management of a sail.

" But all these qualifications, each so admirable in its way, did not reveal to me the real Enid, the cousin whom I want to know, and whom I have loved ever since I, a girl of seven, read in my mother's letter from South Australia of the little, or rather *big*, girl of four who had been brought to Bannockburn to be the daughter of the house. Your portrait, you tell me, is an accurate likeness, but I should have imagined you about my own age had I not known that you are just three years my junior. As a photograph it is superb, owing I suppose to the wonderfully clear dry atmosphere you have in South Australia. I'm so glad we shall be at Bannockburn for Christmas, and, incidentally, for your birthday. It will seem so strange to me to enjoy midsummer weather at Christmas, and to find that cooling breezes come from the south and hot blasts from the north.

" Ralph and his friend Mr. Carew will be immensely surprised to find on arriving that we are expected the following week. The farewells in June had all the tone of finality about them, though I assured Ralph, the day we rode over to Kynnersley Court, that he

would be back in England within two years.

" By-the-bye; speaking of that day and of portraits, I am reminded that there is a portrait in Sir John Kynnersley's library which I have longed in vain to see. In the old days when he was at home now and then on furlough, he made a pet of me, and would give me almost anything to which my childish whims took a fancy ; but whenever I asked him to open the door which stands above the mantelpiece, his kind smile vanished instantly, and he would say, ' No, dear child, what lies behind that door is for no eyes but my own. Not even little May blossom can be allowed to see it.' It is very piteous to think of this delightful man bearing such a life-long burden. The strangest feature of it is that of all those around him there is no one who ever saw his wife. He married in India, and her father, a colonel and a widower, died shortly afterwards. Then Sir John Kynnersley, or Captain Barton as he was then, exchanged into father's old regiment, and being obliged to join at once, he sent his wife to friends in Calcutta, to be put on board the *Cygnet* for passage to England.

" Sir John is still away, and his housekeeper has no idea when to expect him back. He detests fuss, and I expect he is staying quietly away on the continent to escape the perpetual invitations and lionizing to which he was subjected in England.

" And now, dear Enid, good-bye. I expect you and I will take to one another at once, and have what some American friends who were staying with us used to call ' a real good time.' I am looking forward of course to making the acquaintance of Uncle Aleck and Aunt Lilian, and I want, too, to see Corporal Jenkins again. I was only seven when he deserted my father's service

in order to marry and settle at Bannockburn, but I remember feeling very cross about it, for he made a great pet of me, and used to carry me about on his shoulder when I was tiny, and did everything I asked of him—and I'm afraid my demands upon him were heavy—as I grew up. I half suspected at the time that he married and stopped in South Australia to escape my autocratic tyranny !

" Then, too, there are so many people whom you have mentioned in your letters. That dear old Scot, Angus, I'm longing to talk to him, and listen to his dry, wise, pithy sayings. Mick, too, your droll Irish coachman, what a funny character he must be. And those clever trackers Jacky and Billy, it will be most interesting to see them. But there, it will *all* be interesting, and I mustn't ramble on any longer, lest you write me down an excitable schoolgirl rather than a mature and dignified woman of nearly twenty-two summers. So, once more, good-bye !

Your loving cousin,

May."

As Enid finished reading, a maid entered to say that Mick was anxious to see " the young Misthress," and on being shown in, the Irishman, without any beating about the bush, plunged into the subject of his errand thus—" Miss Enid, avourneen, it's poor Mrs. Wilson as is the gratefullest craythur in the worrl'd to-day, an' she begged me to tell ye that it's wan of the blissid saints ye are."

" Nonsense, Mick," laughed the girl, " that sounds too much like one of your own expressions. Now just confess, you've forgotten the message she gave you, so you've just invented another that you thought would suit. But it's no use trying those little tricks with me,

Mick. ‘Blissed saints’ is so unmistakably Irish that you’ve quite given yourself away.”

“Well indade, Miss Enid darlint, ye’re roight. Me mimory’s gettin’ that bad that Kitty sez she’ll be usin’ it prisintly to sift the cinders wid. But for shure, Mrs. Wilson was so happy an’ plazed about her husband that if she didn’t call ye a ‘blissed saint’ it was a ‘swate angel,’ an’ where’s the difference anny way, oi’d like to know?”

“Very well, Mick. I suppose in plain English it means that poor Wilson is quite well and able to drive the mail again.”

“Why av coarse, Miss. Thims the worrds oi meant to say; but ye see whin oi gets to have spache wid ye, face to face loike, the purty smoile av ye dhrives all me wits clane out av me head.”

“Go away, Mick, you foolish fellow, go and talk like that to your wife.”

“Go an’ say the loikes o’ that to Kitty, did ye say, Miss? Bedad an’ it’s the broom handle she’d be bangin’ me wid if oi did. But oi’d jist make bould to say wan more sintince afore oi goes. Oi’ve jist remimbered that Mrs. Wilson axed if ye’d be offended at her comin’ wid her man to thank ye, Miss, for phwat ye’ve done for him.”

“Certainly not. I shall be very pleased to see her, if Wilson brings her out; but you know very well, Mick, that I detest being thanked.”

“Thru for ye, Miss. But all the same it’s mesilf would detist the dirthy spaldeen that didn’t thank ye!”

CHAPTER X.

" Build me straight, O worthy Master !
Staunch and strong, a goodly vessel,
That shall laugh at all disaster,
And with wave and whirlwind wrestle ! "

—Longfellow.

HEAVE AWAY ! HO !

THE good ship *Wombat* was one of those modern steel-built vessels whose spread of canvas, when all sail is carried, amounts to a prodigious area, amazing to landsmen. Well found in every respect, ably commanded, with carefully selected officers and crew, the probabilities were entirely in favour of a safe and speedy run out to Port Adelaide.

The *Wombat* carried a full cargo, part of which would be discharged at Cape Town, and, in addition, many saloon and steerage passengers.

Punctually at ten a.m. on the seventh of July, two powerful tugs ranged up, as the ship lay at anchor off Gravesend, and received their tow-ropes. The windlass was manned and the cable hove short. The Board of Trade officials and passengers' friends went ashore, the anchor was fished and catted, and with a channel pilot in charge, the *Wombat* was towed down past the Nore and round the North Foreland, reaching the Downs about six o'clock. Here the tugs were cast off, and as the light easterly breeze, which had been decreasing during the afternoon, had now entirely dropped, the pilot ordered the anchors to be let go, and the ship made snug for the night.

About two hundred other windbound craft were

riding in this historic anchorage, and as daylight waned, the twinkling of their masthead lights and the reflection from portholes upon the surface of a sea undisturbed by even a ripple, produced an enchanting and fairy-like effect, never to be forgotten by those who gazed on it that summer's evening.

Amongst others whose eyes were feasting upon the beauteous scene were our friends Ralph Grant and Gerald Carew, ensconced comfortably in deck chairs on the poop and waiting for the summons to dinner.

"Ralph, my dear fellow, what say you to a duet?" exclaimed Gerald. "This is full of poetry, and we haven't touched a note for more than a week."

For all answer Ralph bounded from his chair and vanished down the companion, reappearing a moment later with his own violin, Gerald's flute, and a couple of volumes of music.

Both men were accomplished musicians, playing—and playing well—on several instruments. Both had studied under the best masters, both had medals and diplomas, and each in his own college had been in great request whenever either classical or ballad concerts were afoot.

It was therefore not surprising, when presently the soft strains of Beethoven, interpreted with wonderful accuracy and singular tenderness, stole upon the air, that groups of passengers ceased their conversation and drew near to listen.

After awhile the music changed. "Lead kindly light" succeeded the "Moonlight Sonata," followed in turn by the plaintive "Star of peace to wanderers weary." Anon came selections from Mendelssohn's "Lieder ohne Worte," perfectly rendered, which kept the listeners entranced.

As the sweet harmonies finally died away, there was a moment's silence, and then a burst of delighted applause, which was taken up and echoed and re-echoed from many neighbouring vessels.

But aboard the *Wombat* the passengers were promptly and rudely recalled to mundane matters as the loud notes of a bugle played by one of the stewards pealed forth the well-known dinner summons, "Officers' wives have puddings and pies, soldiers' wives have skilly." A general burst of laughter followed, together with the remark by the captain, "That is descending from the sublime to the ridiculous with a vengeance!"

Captain Fraser was a splendid specimen of that happy combination—a first-rate navigator and a refined and cultured gentleman. He was, indeed, more than this, for no one made a voyage in his ship without speedily learning that she was commanded by a sincere though unobtrusive Christian. His grace, when the company had taken their places at the dinner-tables, was characteristic of the man. The two brief words, "Thank God!" fervently and solemnly uttered, were far more impressive than a more lengthy but perfunctory formula.

Ralph was at the head of a table parallel to the Captain's, his friend Carew having secured a seat on his right hand, and as Captain Fraser glanced across he was prompt to recognise in them the men to whom he had been listening a few minutes before. "Why, doctor," he exclaimed, "I had no idea it was you handling that violin just now in such masterly fashion. If you continue to give us such treats during the voyage you may safely keep the dispensary locked, for you'll charm away all illness. And your friend, too, was so muffled that I didn't recognise him as a

clergyman. You see, I've been very busy since we left Gravesend this morning, and have had no leisure to make the acquaintance of my passengers. Pray, doctor, present me to your friend."

"This is Captain Fraser, Gerald. My friend is the Rev. Gerald Carew, captain," said Ralph in response.

"Well, Mr. Carew," observed the captain, "if, as I shrewdly suspect, your superb playing of the flute may be taken as an index to more weighty matters, I am truly glad to welcome you aboard my ship, and I hope you will accept my invitation to act as hon. chaplain during the voyage out to Port Adelaide."

"It is very good of you, Captain Fraser," Gerald replied, "and I shall be sincerely glad to do as you wish."

"Well, then, we'll consider that settled," said the captain heartily, "and when dinner is over I'll make an announcement on the subject."

General conversation ensued ; but when dessert was reached, the captain rose and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, we expect to spend some three months together, and I trust we may have no reason to tire of each other's company. So far as it is in my power, or that of my officers, to make the voyage a pleasant one, you may rely upon our doing our utmost to that end. And now I wish to say that it has always been my custom to conduct prayers aboard my ship, but for this trip I have very gladly delegated that duty to the Rev. Gerald Carew, the gentleman who, with our friend Dr. Grant, so pleased us all by an *al fresco* concert. Morning and evening prayers will be conducted by Mr. Carew in the music saloon immediately after breakfast and at 9-30 p.m. respectively, and while I shall be glad to welcome all who care to attend to offer praise

to Almighty God and to seek His blessing, yet it will of course be fully understood that attendance is purely optional. This evening, our first day out, prayers will be at nine o'clock instead of nine-thirty, so the ship's bell will sound in half-an-hour ; and as we are lying at anchor in a flat calm the service will be held on deck."

As the captain left the saloon the hum of conversation was resumed, and various comments were passed upon the novel announcement. Many passengers were sincerely glad of the opportunity for divine worship ; some were indifferent, while a few were positively opposed. But these last, finding that the captain's views were shared by his officers at the different tables, sensible too of the attraction of novelty, and admitting a certain indebtedness to this stalwart young musical chaplain and his medical friend, sank their personal feeling on the subject and trooped on deck with the rest.

The captain had utilized the interval since leaving the dinner-table to go himself and inform the steerage passengers of the arrangement, earnestly inviting them to take advantage of it—a plea to which the great majority readily responded.

Captain, officers and crew were there, with the exception of the watch ; the pilot too attended, so that when Gerald rose and announced the opening hymn, " Jesu, where'er thy people meet," he faced a congregation of fully two hundred persons.

Lanterns having been slung, there was abundant artificial light, besides a glorious full moon, and hymn books were plentiful. A fine American organ had been wheeled from the music saloon, and was played by the chief officer, Mr. Paynter, while a lady passenger accompanied on the piano, Gerald and Ralph on the flute and violin, and the second officer on his

cornet, an instrument of remarkably sweet tone.

When the singing commenced, to such a strong instrumental accompaniment, the effect was very grand, the sound being carried an immense distance across the waters, so as to be distinctly heard on board other vessels. A large American barque was lying two cables' length away, and no sooner had the hymn concluded than her skipper hailed through a speaking trumpet, "*Wombat*, ahoy! If it's a service you're having there, I guess I'd like to come aboard."

Instantly Captain Fraser responded, "You'll be made heartily welcome," and five minutes later a tall, grey-haired man stepped on deck, introduced himself as Captain Benjamin P. Guest, master of the *Constitution*, of Baltimore, and, whipping a violin from under his arm, announced his desire to assist.

The second hymn was "At even, e'er the sun was set." The chanting of the 67th psalm was succeeded by the collect "Lighten our darkness," and Faber's grand hymn, "Hark! Hark, my soul!"

Then Gerald seated himself at the piano, while Ralph, in a rich strong baritone, sang, "When the mists have rolled away," many other voices joining in the refrain.

Reading psalm 73 v. 28, Gerald briefly referred to the peculiar circumstances under which so many persons, previously absolute strangers to one another, were now thrown together.

Polite attention had deepened into evident and keen interest ere the address concluded, and the hymn "Sun of my soul, thou Saviour dear" fittingly closed a service in which all must have realized that they were drawing near to God, and Gerald's strong voice pronouncing the benediction was heard far beyond the

limits of the ship ; indeed the ensuing silence was first broken by quite a chorus of " Thank you ! thank you ! " from other vessels.

As the congregation dispersed, the American visitor warmly thanked Captain Fraser for the invitation so cordially given, and then, turning to Gerald, he said " Sir, I carry about with me on my voyages a birthday-book, given me many years ago by my mother. It contains the name of many a good man in my own country, from President Garfield to D. L. Moody. Now, sir, I'd be proud if you would add your autograph, for we serve the same Lord, and I'd like to pray for you whenever I come across your name."

" By all means," said Gerald, " and as I too carry a birthday-book, let us exchange signatures, Captain Guest." And so it was arranged, and with hearty handshakes the good skipper descended to his gig, and presently a final cheery hail pealed across from the deck of the *Constitution*.

During the third officer's watch there was just the suggestion of a faint air from E.N.E., then what the sailor terms a capful of wind, and long before daylight this had freshened to a steady breeze, so that all hands were turned up, and the pilot and captain were called. By two a.m. the anchors were hove, and sufficient sail got on the ship to give her steerage way. Then, gliding gracefully through the Downs, her speed increased as each moment saw additional canvas spread, until by the time Dungeness light was left on her starboard quarter, she was making, with the tide in her favour, a clear ten knots.

After sunrise the wind became sensibly stronger and remained steady in the same favourable quarter, so that when the breakfast bugle sounded, at nine o'clock,

the passengers were surprised to find themselves racing along abreast of Brighton, and were warned to have their letters ready by afternoon, as the pilot would go ashore off the Isle of Wight.

Immediately after morning prayer in the music saloon, the regulation tour of the ship was made by the captain and doctor, the latter finding little need for his services beyond urgent advice to some passengers to keep clear of their cabins and spend as much time as they possibly could on deck, in the health-giving sea air and sunshine.

To the captain and his passengers alike the advantage of the early start was evident, for the long summer day lay before them ; and while her commander was delighted at the prospect of gaining an offing during daylight, the groups who strolled on the poop or lounged in deck chairs were enchanted with the steady motion of the great ship, as with a thousand square yards of canvas set she rapidly left one well-known headland and landmark after another astern, until by dusk she was abreast of Portland, having run a hundred and eighty miles since leaving her anchorage.

" What do you think of your sea-trip so far, my invalid parson ? " merrily enquired Ralph, as he joined Gerald on the poop during the afternoon, after a visit to one or two passengers who were on the sick list, and a romp with some youngsters who had struck him as pining for a game yet not quite clear how to set about it.

" Any man would indeed be hard to please who didn't thoroughly enjoy this," responded his friend. " I seem to be inhaling new life and health with every breath. You and others have spoken to me of the superiority of a sailing vessel to a steamer, but now I realize its advantages for myself and am revelling

in them. Who would exchange this perfect cleanliness for the smoke, smuts and dust of a steamship, or this steady and exquisitely dreamlike motion for the ceaseless throb and whirr of engines and vibration of the propeller ? ”

“ Well, if you propound that question, I suppose there are thousands of busy people intent upon hurrying at the greatest attainable speed from one portion of the globe to another, who would without hesitation express a preference for the things you so disdain.”

“ No, Ralph, no ; it’s impossible. No one could *prefer* them. But being, as you say, compelled by business exigencies to sacrifice comfort to rapidity, they would perforce, willy nilly, take the swiftest means of transit, submitting to all the drawbacks as necessary evils, but certainly not preferring them. And even in the matter of speed, just consider how magnificently we have bowled along to-day ever since dawn, overhauling and passing several tramp steamboats. Cast your eyes upward at that majestic fabric, that mountainous mass of white sails, every one of which is stiff as a board under pressure of the steady breeze ; then glance over the side and note the terrific pace at which we are being forced through the water. This is superb ! ”

“ I quite agree, Gerald ; and if we could only rely upon holding a leading wind right through to Adelaide we should, as you say, compare well with many a steamship, even in the matter of speed. But there is just the joint in our armour, the one vulnerable spot. Winds are variable, unreliable, and although the weather looks settled just now and the glass is steady, you and I may stand on this poop before many days are over and see every bit of canvas flapping idly as

the ship rolls helplessly on the ground swell, or maybe we shall run into weather so wild as to make it impossible to stand at all without holding on to shroud or backstay, and where now we see tier above tier of sails in order and beauty there may be topmasts and yards sent down, and just very little close reefed lower canvas all we dare show to the blast. That would be bad enough : from anything worse may God defend us!"

" Yes, of course there are risks," replied Carew, " and I see that in either of these two cases the advantage would lie with the steamship : but for the moment let us thoroughly enjoy and be grateful for this intensity of pleasure. Ah, here comes Captain Fraser."

" Well, gentlemen, what say you to this? Nothing could have been more propitious."

" True, Captain, we were just discussing it, and the doctor was trying to damp my enthusiasm by dismal suggestions of dead calm or wild hurricane ; but as you came up we had arrived at the wise decision to accept our present mercies with thankfulness."

" Quite right, Mr. Carew, we gain nothing by meeting trouble half-way, while we are great gainers by cultivating a contented and thankful spirit ; besides, it reacts upon others, and thus those around us may be brightened by our cheerfulness. While we were in London this time I ran up West one morning to call on an old friend, a well-known physician, and heard from him a good story bearing on this very subject. A wealthy young lady, a patient of his, said, ' Oh, doctor, — and — (naming two of her friends) have both volunteered for the foreign mission field, and been accepted by the C.M.S. committee. Now, here am I, just as anxious as they to go out, free of all cost to the Society, yet my health prevents it. What *am* I to

do ?' ' Well, my dear,' said the doctor, ' if God wanted your help in the foreign field He would give you physical fitness, and there is plenty of work for you at home, all ready to your hand.' ' Oh, what ? what ?' she cried eagerly ; and then looking very woebegone, she moaned, ' My weak health checks me at every turn.' ' Now there is your mistake,' said the doctor, ' your face at this moment shows me you haven't yet learnt your vocation.' ' Oh doctor, what *do* you mean ?' cried the poor girl, looking even more distressed than before. ' I mean simply this. Drop that melancholy expression, and cultivate one of unclouded cheerfulness. I know you are happy at heart. Shew it in your face. Smile ! Why, dear me, do you ever ride in an omnibus ?' ' Oh yes, often.' ' Well then, the next time you do so just recollect that there are many miserable people in the world. Perhaps there may be one or two in that omnibus. Now who knows but your smile—make it as bright as you can—may serve to cheer some faint heart ? Don't you think the experiment worth trying ?'

" But tell me, said I, " what was the result ? How did your prescription work ? "

" Oh wonderfully," he replied, and then added playfully, " I fancy she spends quite a deal of her leisure riding about smiling in omnibuses ! "

" Thanks for your story, Captain," said Carew. " Now, Ralph, old man, you had better make a note of that prescription, you may find it very useful in your practice."

" Yes, indeed," the doctor responded heartily, " it's famous."

CHAPTER XI.

" Sail on, nor fear to breast the sea ;
Our hearts, our hopes, are all with thee.
Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears,
Our faith triumphant o'er our fears,
Are all with thee—are all with thee ! "

—Longfellow.

THE VOYAGE.

" **W**ELL, gentlemen, you'll think me a garrulous old fellow," said Captain Fraser ; " I didn't come to spin yarns, however, but to seek help."

" Why, Captain, how can we render help ? "

" Very much on the lines of the smiling story. I have always found my passengers prone to mope a little during the early days of a voyage, and I should feel really grateful if you, being so musical, would between you accept the responsibility of arranging some concerts. You may count upon me for facilities, whether in the saloon or on deck, but I prefer to leave the selection of performers and all other details in your competent hands."

" Very well, Captain, may we have our first concert immediately after dinner this evening ? We've already discovered some musical talent among the saloon passengers, and I suppose you would not object to an occasional recruit from the officers or crew, provided we don't interfere with the duties of the ship ? "

" My dear sir," said the Captain, with emphasis, as he walked away, " I give you *carte blanche*."

" Now, Carew," said the doctor, " come along and

yarn to those young uns. They'd thoroughly enjoy some of your stories. It's not a very gay time for them cooped up aboard ship."

The children's tea was usually served in their own special saloon, but on this the first day out they were regaled on deck, and great was the enjoyment of the merry youngsters, and their happiness was increased when the doctor and chaplain joined the party.

Several of the elder ones had finished their meal, and just as the clergyman was in the most thrilling part of a fairy tale one of the nurses cried, "Oh Master Eric, come back!" and jumping hastily from her seat, rushed after one of her charges, a bright boy of five years, who was seen to be climbing on the lee rail. His nurse's voice only whetted his appetite for adventure, and the sturdy legs moved quickly, as they had often done in the old orchard at home.

Meanwhile several of the watch had caught sight of the climber, and ran to snatch him out of harm's way. But Master Eric, though a very charming little laddie, was very high-spirited and self-willed. He had determined to sit astride that rail, and nothing short of physical force would stop him.

The doctor, seeing the boy's danger, set down two chubby babies who were snuggling on his knees, and jumping clean over Carew as he reclined in a deck chair, made a dash for the venturesome Eric. Unhappily the ship at that moment gave a lurch. It was a very slight lurch, almost unnoticeable, but it sufficed to unship the triumphant climber and jerk him from his perch so that he struck the water several yards clear of the *Wombat's* side as she raced upon her course.

Instantly the doctor's coat was off, and in far less time than these words take to write he had leapt from

the rail and actually clutched the struggling boy.

The officer of the watch and at least half a dozen of the crew had witnessed the occurrence, and the first instinctive cries of "Man overboard!" were promptly followed by sharp orders in rapid succession: "Ready about!" "Tacks and sheets!" "Hard a lee with your helm!" and the bosun's hoarse shout, "Tumble up below there. Lifeboat's crew away!"

Now was seen in practice the advantage of perfect discipline. Every member of that well-trained crew knew his precise duty and carried it out promptly without unseemly chatter.

Captain Fraser had been immediately summoned, and had taken charge. The great ship was brought up head to wind, her sails flat aback. The lifeboat, manned by eight stout seamen in charge of the second officer, was swung clear and dropped. There was no need for a repetition of that one crisp order, "Give way, my lads!" for eight oar blades dipped in unison, and the boat sprang away on her errand as though animated by the general desire to rescue the brave young doctor and the child he was risking his life to save.

Every one on board the *Wombat* stood gazing intently towards the distant speck fully a thousand yards from the ship, a speck which was alternately seen on the summit of a wave or was hidden from view in the trough of the following seas, and much sympathy was evinced for the distracted mother, who with three young children of whom Eric was the eldest, was going out to Cape Town to join her husband, an officer in the garrison there.

"Mr. Carew," exclaimed Captain Fraser, "what are your friend's swimming powers?"

"Oh you can set your mind at rest about him,

Captain. He is quite at home in the water and could keep afloat for hours. I'm more concerned about the boy."

"Then I think all's well," responded the Captain, "for my glass tells me that the doctor is doing the most sensible thing—lying on his back with the child on his chest. What do *you* say, Mr. Beveridge?"

"I'm quite of your opinion, Captain," replied the gentleman thus addressed, a tall somewhat stern-featured clean-shaven man of middle age, travelling with a servant and his inseparable companion, a handsome mastiff named Hector: "the doctor is evidently well up to his work."

Twenty-five minutes later a great cheer resounded fore and aft as the second officer handed up the rescued child, looking very unlike the bright jaunty boy who had evaded his nurse half an hour before.

Conscious, but very white and very subdued, he was passed from hand to hand, until his mother, disregarding the saturated garments, clasped her firstborn to her arms, and, kissing him passionately, hurried below, where the stewardess had a hot bath awaiting him. Then came hot blankets, a cup of hot milk, and Master Eric was tucked away into his cot a sobered and very penitent wee laddie.

The doctor was the object of much congratulation and solicitude, but laughingly assuring his admirers that he had enjoyed his bath and only wanted a rub down, he vanished in the direction of his cabin. When he had gone the second officer remarked to the captain, "That's a splendid man, sir. We found him taking things quite coolly, just lying on his back as if he'd been on a couch and making the youngster laugh by telling him stories. Coming back in the boat, he kept

up the boy's spirits by chaffing him about what his mother and nurse would do to him, and reeled off some rhyming nonsense like this :—

Here comes nurse with a red-hot poultice,

Claps it on and takes no notice.

' Oh ! ' cries Eric, ' that's too hot ! '

' No,' says nurse, ' I'm sure it's not.' "

"Aye," responded Captain Fraser, " he's a *man*, every inch of him. I'm proud to have him aboard."

In a few minutes the doctor was on deck again, busily arranging for the first concert. He and the chaplain took the commander at his word, and a most successful entertainment resulted. The joint managers of course took a leading part ; but they had very efficient helpers, who rendered classical productions and also several items in lighter vein, together with some admirably rendered glees and two recitations. This was but the first of many similar functions, and they were always, to quote the well-worn journalistic phrase, " crowded and enthusiastic."

Before the *Wombat* had been three days at sea the hon. chaplain and doctor had between them ransacked the ship for the best available material to form a choir for the Sunday services, and it was decided to devote one hour every Friday evening to practice. The doctor, third officer, four ladies and three gentlemen from the saloon, three stewards, two A.B.'s, and two steerage passengers—sixteen in all—composed the choir, while the chief officer acted as organist.

The first Sunday morning broke fair and full of promise for a glorious day. They were now off the Spanish coast, the temperature sensibly warmer, so that awnings had been rigged, and divine service, both morning and evening, was held on deck.

The Captain, who had looked in on Friday evening during the practice, was greatly pleased with the efficiency of the choir, and expressed his regret that the hon. chaplain and doctor could not be permanently enrolled in the ship's company.

But better was to come. Before the ship's bell had ceased sounding, all on board except those absolutely kept away by duty had gathered for service. The congregational singing and audible responses right through the Service would have gladdened many a clergyman's heart in churches ashore. The anthem "*O taste and see how gracious the Lord is,*" seemed to come as a divine invitation. Then Carew, taking for his text St. John X. v. 11, "*I am the Good Shepherd ; the good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep,*" spoke for just fifteen minutes as a man living near to God, and anxious to bring all his hearers into the same close relationship. He closed with these solemn words, "*My friends, that good Shepherd gave His life for you, for me.* I, his youthful minister, speaking on His behalf, appeal to you in His name to yield yourselves to Him. Do not, I beseech you, look upon this service as a mere formality, an event in the daily routine, a break in the monotony of the sea voyage ; but let the hymns, the anthem, the words of the incomparable Liturgy, above all the words of our text—the Saviour's own message to us—speak to our consciences and hearts, so that the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, may this morning welcome into His fold more of the sheep for whom He died. God help you to say, '*Lord Jesus, receive me now, and help me to be Thy faithful soldier and servant until my life's end.*' "

Evening prayer was shortened, and when the words of the text were announced, "*The shadow of Peter*"

(Acts V., v. 15), many wondered how the preacher would interpret it. They were not left long in doubt, for Carew, following up his morning sermon, immediately explained that his subject was *Influence*, and with great skill he enforced the lesson that those who are seeking by divine grace to follow the good Shepherd, should by holy, consecrated lives make their influence felt by all into whose company they are thrown. The influence may be quite unobtrusive, but none the less real and effectual, so that unbelievers may be attracted to Christ and fellow Christians helped and cheered upon the homeward journey.

"Let me close," said the preacher "by relating a story once told by the late Dr. Guthrie. A British frigate was cruising off the coast of Spain, very near to our present position. A gale of several days' duration had just blown itself out, leaving a heavy ground swell. Shortly after daylight the masthead look-out hailed the deck and reported what appeared to be a derelict ship, a couple of miles on their lee bow. The frigate's course being promptly altered, she ran down to the stranger and came up into the wind a couple of cables' length of her.

"A boat was called away and proceeded in charge of the second lieutenant, accompanied by the surgeon and a midshipman, to ascertain if any of the crew were still aboard and alive, as, viewed from the frigate, there was no sign of survivors. While the Bowman held on with his boathook, the three officers clambered to the deck, and, making a hasty search, discovered what at first sight appeared to be a bundle of clothing; but a closer inspection revealed the attenuated form of a man, apparently at the point of death, and so wasted that the middy, a mere boy, was able to lift him to the side,

whence he and the surgeon lowered the poor fellow into the ready arms of the crew, who laid him with the utmost care and tenderness in the stern-sheets, while the doctor applied a restorative and desired the lieutenant to order their immediate return to the frigate, so that the rescued man might be placed in a cot and carefully fed. But they had scarcely cast off from the wreck before the anxious surgeon observed a movement of his patient's lips, and, bending over him, could just detect the words spoken very faintly, but with startling earnestness, 'There's—another—man!' and then, exhausted with the effort, the sufferer relapsed into insensibility. Instantly the boat was put about, and a more thorough inspection of the ship resulted in finding the inanimate form of another poor seaman.

"And now," said Gerald very solemnly, "I will give you the application of this story, as I myself heard it years ago. Oh, my friends, you who have yourselves been brought to yield to that good Shepherd of whom we heard this morning, to you I appeal, and in our Master's name would adjure you, so long as in this sinful and lost world it can be said, 'There's—another—man!' another, for whom Christ died, yet in need of rescue, in need of salvation from the drifting wreck and from the ruin which is impending, oh, my brother, my sister, go to that soul and plead for Christ! go to Christ and plead for that soul! We say rejoicingly, triumphantly, with regard to ourselves, 'He loved *me* and *gave Himself for me!*' Oh, if that be so, if He indeed did all this for us, may the living God awaken in our hearts this very night the intense desire to live no longer to ourselves, but to Him!"

Then they sang the hymn "The day Thou gavest,

Lord, is ended," and thus closed their first Sunday Services at sea.

During the sermon, Mr. Beveridge, accompanied as usual by his faithful Hector, had been standing within earshot, and now accosted the chaplain with the enquiry, "Do you really believe all these things of which you have been speaking?"

"Unquestionably," replied Carew. "You yourself were present at the recital of the creed, even if you did not join in our worship. To me, those words, 'I believe in *God* . . . and in *Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord*, and . . . in the *Holy Ghost*' are very real: the basis of all peace and joy, here and hereafter."

"Well, Mr. Carew, I envy you, but I cannot say that I share your views. I have not known either peace or joy for many years; and as for God, He appears to me to be tyrannical. To be frank, I have rather an aversion for parsons. As for you, you have strong points in your favour. But I wish, both for yourself and your friend, that fine young doctor, that your intellectual abilities, your splendid voices, and your remarkable musical attainments were used to make the world brighter and happier, without being bracketed with these dull and morbid religious notions."

"Come, come, sir," answered Carew, "there we join issue. Neither my friend Grant nor I find anything dull and morbid in Christianity. The Lord Jesus Christ is to us not a mere historical figure, but the mighty Son of God, *and our Saviour*—a real living Person. Take the knowledge of Him from us and life would indeed be dull."

"I am convinced that you are in earnest, that you really mean all this," said Mr. Beveridge. "I can only repeat I envy you your happiness."

Carew was much struck by the evident sincerity of this singularly austere and reserved fellow-passenger, and ventured to reply, "Let me beg you, Mr. Beveridge, not to feel hurt or annoyed with me if I say that my friend and I prayed that we might be divinely guided as to our choice of a ship, and we have already had cause to believe that our prayer was answered. Permit me to add that we will together pray for you that God may graciously give you that which you say you envy in us."

Mr. Beveridge extended his hand, saying, "I may not share your views, but I honour the boldness with which you avow them, and I should indeed be a curmudgeon were I to take offence at your offer on my behalf. It is kindly meant, and I desire to express my sense of your goodwill. Good-night!"

* * * * *

In perfect weather and with favourable winds the *Wombat* made a quick run to Cape Town. On arrival there little Eric had to part from his idol, the doctor to whom he owed his life. His father and mother, Major and Mrs. Brewster, overwhelmed Ralph with grateful acknowledgment, and the doctor was gratified to find on his cabin table a week later a handsomely-framed cabinet photograph of the boy whom he had rescued.

Nothing could have been more delightful than the *Wombat's* voyage to the Cape. Captain, officers, and crew were proud of their ship's behaviour, while the passengers spoke of their trip so far as a delightful yachting cruise.

The Southern Ocean is not precisely the quarter of the globe where one may expect uninterrupted fine weather, yet it was the beginning of summer, and there

was ample warrant for hoping that the ship would run through to Port Adelaide with as great comfort to her passengers as during the preceding agreeable weeks.

But ten days after leaving Table Bay there came a change. The wind, which had held steadily in the S.W. veered to N.E., then slackened, and finally, in the early morning, dropped altogether.

When the passengers obeyed the summons to breakfast they noticed with amazement that, for the first time during the voyage, fiddles had been rigged on the tables, although the ship lay absolutely without motion. Their surprise increased when it was observed that the captain and chief officer were both absent from the meal and that all the deadlights in the saloon were closed, two more occurrences quite without precedent.

The second officer, when questioned as to the absence of his seniors, replied carelessly that they were taking breakfast in the chart room for a change, but this was so evidently evasive that the enquiry was pressed by some of the gentlemen passengers who were old voyagers.

"Well," said he, "you have been long enough aboard the *Wombat* to know that Captain Fraser is not an alarmist, but he doesn't feel free to appear at breakfast this morning; he thinks the present calm will not last long, in fact we are probably in for a strong wind, though it's not likely to continue many hours at this season of the year. Now I must get back on deck." As the second officer left the saloon, the chief steward, after whispering to the doctor, also hurriedly made his exit.

Ralph, rapping the table to call attention, said, "I am desired to mention that it is essential that all the ports should be kept closed. You will find that during

breakfast the ports in your state-rooms have been screwed up, and you are particularly requested not to attempt to open them. The storm which is now threatening may pass off, but the captain deems it wise to be fully prepared should there be a sudden squall. If all have finished we will, with your good leave, adjourn to the music saloon for prayers."

The chaplain that morning gave a brief address on the words "Lo I am with you alway," after which those present—and there were few absentees—joined in singing the hymn commencing

"O Rock of Ages ! since on Thee
By grace my feet are planted."

As the brief service closed, Captain Fraser looked in for a moment, saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, I must not hide from you that we are likely to have a strong gale. I tell you this quite frankly in order to prevent needless alarm. We have a splendid ship under us and, please God, we will weather the storm. But as the indications point to our having a rough time and a good deal of water on board, I would suggest that all the ladies and children at all events remain below. It may be necessary later to clear the deck of the gentlemen as well, but we will hope not. Now, *au revoir!*"

Beckoning to Ralph and Carew, the captain led the way to the chart room. As he turned and faced them they both noticed that the cheery smile he had worn when addressing the passengers had given place to a serious, even anxious look.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I've called you out of earshot of the other passengers just to say that I rely greatly on your assistance. This abnormal gloom and stillness must strike even you as extraordinary. To me, as an old mariner, they presage such weather as no commander

cares to face when he has passengers aboard. All my officers will be required on deck, so I beg that you will do your best to reassure the passengers, both in the saloon and in the steerage, for they will probably be considerably alarmed. Good-bye. Get away to your charges, for the storm may burst at any minute."

"Carew, old man," said Ralph, "we had better separate. If you'll see to the saloon passengers, I'll tackle the steerage, but first I'll get my violin."

"Capital," said Carew; "we shall probably need all our musical powers to-day. God bless you, dear chap," and with a warm hand-clasp the friends parted.

CHAPTER XII.

"God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain:
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain."

—*Cowper.*

DISASTER.

THE doctor and the chaplain had barely reached their respective posts when a low distant moaning was heard, gradually increasing in intensity until the volume of sound drowned ordinary conversation throughout the ship, compelling the captain and chief officer to give orders through speaking trumpets, while in the saloons and state-rooms persons wishing to speak to one another resorted to shouting.

But the majority of the passengers were in no mood for speech. Amid the gathering gloom they cowered in awed silence, children clinging to their parents in terror, their elders scarcely less alarmed.

Carew in the first saloon and the doctor in the steerage succeeded in infusing a measure of courage, and the blanched faces looked a little brighter at the cheery words which, explaining that the ominous sound was caused by the rapidly approaching tempest, bade every one make use of the lines which the stewards had rigged across in order to prevent accident.

Then a hoarse order was heard along the decks, penetrating to the cabins, "Hold on fore and aft," and in an instant the great ship was in the fierce grip of the storm and heeled over until her lee rail was under

water. But Captain Fraser had made his preparations thoroughly. More rapid orders were heard and as rapidly executed, and after a brief interval, during which the affrighted passengers thought the end had indeed come, the *Wombat* slowly righted herself and came up into the wind. Then she rode safely amid the rapidly rising seas, which momentarily increased in size under the influence of the terrific energy developed by the wind in the few minutes since first the tempest burst upon them.

Until evening the vessel bravely held her own, remaining hove-to under a close reefed maintopsail, with all other canvas furled. But just after eight bells had been struck the velocity of the wind became sensibly greater, and while the officers were gazing anxiously upwards, there was suddenly a report like the discharge of a big gun, the maintopsail was blown from the bolt ropes, and the next moment every particle of canvas had vanished.

This mishap was naturally and immediately followed by further trouble, for a heavy sea broke over the ship, smashing many feet of the bulwarks and carrying three men overboard, besides lifting a couple of boats from the chocks and driving them bodily aft against the smoking-room.

Several of the gentlemen passengers were within, and, alarmed by the impact, made for the door. Mr. Beveridge was sitting nearest, and was therefore the first to reach it, but no sooner had he stepped outside than a second sea swept the ship and he was hurled violently to the deck and carried into the scuppers. Hector with one bound was at his side, tugging at the sleeve of his prostrate master, but finding only a dead unresponsive weight, the faithful hound sent forth a

series of dismal howls which were heard even amid the crashing and booming of the tempest. Amongst the many upon whose ears fell those sounds of distress were Ralph and Carew, who were at the time endeavouring to hearten some of the alarmed lady passengers. Instantly hurrying on deck and joined by some of the crew, they carried the injured and unconscious man carefully into their own cabin, where he was undressed, laid upon the doctor's bed, and found to be suffering from severe concussion.

His servant was sent for, but was not in his quarters, and as further search failed to discover him, it was concluded that he was one of the unfortunates washed overboard.

Meanwhile, all available strength had been brought to bear upon getting a square piece of canvas spread in the weather mizen rigging, a work of extreme difficulty and risk in such a wild storm. Happily the task was effectually carried out, and the *Wombat* being again brought up into the wind lay more easily, though she rolled considerably, to the discomfort of all on board.

Then, with pealing thunder, vivid lightning, and torrents of rain, night fell around the ship.

When dawn broke, the force of the wind had slightly diminished and the sky was clearing, so that by the time the sun appeared all the indications pointed to a welcome change.

But the sea still ran too heavily to admit of putting the vessel on her course, indeed the waves appeared to be if anything more gigantic than ever, and viewed from the poop in the clear morning radiance the scene, as far as the eye could reach, was one of incomparable grandeur.

As the vast masses of water rolled majestically by, each was crowned with snow-white foam, and though there was probably a space of fully three hundred feet between the crests, as the crashing battalions were hurled past the ship in ceaseless ordered rank, the eye, in following them, saw only mile upon mile of snowy whiteness, vividly reflecting the sunlight and passing on, ever on, into infinite distance.

The two friends stood together holding on by the shrouds and silently gazing upon the fascinating panorama, each possessed by the same fear lest the other should break the spell which the unprecedented experience had cast upon them. Thus for fully twenty minutes they remained absorbed in amazed contemplation.

It was the captain's voice which at length fell upon their ears as, stepping unheard out of the chart room, he uttered the words, "These see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep. For He commandeth and raiseth the stormy wind which lifteth up the waves thereof."

"Ah, Captain Fraser," said Carew, "you have just expressed what was in our minds ; but what are the prospects ? I trust we've seen the worst."

" My answer, Mr. Carew, is that the glass is rising steadily, and as soon as this sea goes down we shall try to get on our course again. As to seeing the 'worst,' I can only tell you you've seen the very worst weather I've ever seen, and I've been at sea for over thirty years, twelve of them on the China coast, where, as you know, the typhoons cause great disaster to shipping."

" Well, Captain," said Ralph, "of course to *us* it was the very worst, far worse than we had conceived

possible. No wonder we were appalled by the severity of the gale if you found it the worst in your experience."

"The only point on which I would correct you, doctor, is in speaking of this as a 'gale.' It is quite common for us to take a landsman to task for applying the term 'gale' to what we should only call a smart breeze, but you go to the other extreme, you are altogether too modest. *I* should say we have just passed through a hurricane, and a severe one. But there goes the summons to breakfast. I told the steward to hustle things, for not one of us has had a wink of sleep, and a hot meal will be very welcome. You needn't repeat what I say to any of the passengers, but it is just the mercy of God that there is any breakfast at all, or any one alive to want it. By the way, how are your patients?"

"Mr. Beveridge is still unconscious and quite likely to remain so for some days. Mrs. Hawtrey and her little daughter are both doing well, and will be about again when we get better weather. The two seamen and the lamp trimmer are badly hurt, and I'm afraid that poor Basden will have to lose his left hand, as it is terribly crushed, while the lamp trimmer is injured internally."

"In that case," said the Captain, "I had better send him ashore at Port Adelaide to be treated in the hospital."

"That will certainly be best for him," replied the doctor. "Indeed it is not unlikely Mr. Beveridge will also have to go to the hospital. As his servant, poor fellow, has been lost overboard, and he himself is unconscious, we can get no clue at present as to his friends, although we know he is booked for Port Adelaide. But in any case I shall see him into

comfortable quarters, while my friend Carew goes to Melbourne to stay a few days at the Deanery before joining me at Bannockburn. I shall of course go home as soon as I'm free ; but leave my patient I cannot."

" Bravo, doctor ! That's what I should have expected of you. Stick to duty ! But here's breakfast, and that's where our duty lies for the present."

" Good morning, ladies and gentlemen," cried the Captain genially. " We've had rather a dusting, as we sailors express it, since I last met you, and I'm afraid the many empty chairs mean that some of my passengers have not spent an altogether comfortable night ; but now the chaplain will give thanks for the welcome food, and I'm sure we all thank God for the bright sky overhead and the falling sea." And so the good man chatted on cheerily throughout the meal, effectually dissipating the hopeless alarm to which some at least of his hearers had become a prey.

By the time breakfast was over the sea had still further subsided, and all hands were busy bending new canvas to replace the sails which had been carried away.

As to the boats, the most seriously damaged was the port lifeboat, a valuable craft capable of carrying forty persons. A green sea which broke on board had torn this boat from the chocks, snapping the chains as though they were twine, and had hurled it to the deck with a gaping chasm in its starboard side. However, the carpenter and his mates got to work upon it by noon, and five hours' hard toil saw it seaworthy once more, with the lost oars, masts, sails, provisions and water carefully replaced, and the staunch boat in every respect ready for any call that might be made upon it.

The doctor spent a busy day among his patients,

for, in addition to the more serious cases, there were numerous minor contusions which demanded surgical attention. The sailor, Basden, was operated upon successfully during the afternoon, but little could be done to mitigate the sufferings of the poor lamp trimmer, whose internal injuries were very severe. Carew was unwearying in his efforts to supplement the doctor's ministrations, and Ralph chaffingly promised to report him favourably to the captain with a view to his being officially entered on the ship's books as male nurse !

An attempt to get the ship on her course again proved calamitous, for another big sea came aboard, doing further damage, and Captain Fraser was obliged reluctantly to lie-to once more.

" You must understand, doctor," said he to Ralph, " that this is altogether unusual. As a rule the wind is westerly in these latitudes all the year round. We have had this N.E. gale now for thirty-six hours, and apparently we may be detained for another night at least. All this time we are drifting to the southward of our course, and what with wind and ocean currents we may get a good deal too far south to be comfortable. With steam it would have been different, but even a steamship would have had to lie-to yesterday."

" To me," said Ralph, " all this is a novel and most interesting experience. But unhappily I have not only myself to consider, and I tell you Captain that if we are delayed much longer it will go hard with poor 'lamps.' Besides, Mr. Beveridge remains unconscious and I should like to get him ashore as soon as possible."

" All right, doctor, we'll do all we can, you may be quite sure. So good night, some of us must try to get a little sleep."

For another twelve hours the *Wombat* was detained, but at last the welcome order to make sail was given, and from breakfast until evening the vessel held on her course. Then came another and most unwelcome change. As the passengers trooped on deck after dinner they found the air so chilly that the majority returned to the warmth of the saloon. A little later the ship ran into a dense fog, and the doctor, who had gone on deck for a brisk walk and a whiff of air, after spending some time with his patients, was astonished to find the second officer superintending one of the quartermasters who appeared to be casting the lead.

"Why surely we are not in the vicinity of land," exclaimed Ralph.

"No, doctor, the captain's afraid of something worse than land. This dense, cold fog suggests possible icebergs, and we are testing the temperature of the water."

At that moment the Captain approached with Mr. Paynter, and, on receiving the second officer's report, he spoke hastily to his companion, and the next moment the order "All hands shorten sail" rang through the ship. The watch on deck sprang aloft instantly, quickly followed by the men who had promptly tumbled up from below, and the activity of all was spurred by Mr. Paynter's repeated cry "Be smart, lads!"

Smart indeed they were, but the task remained unfinished, for there came a sudden crash which caused the great ship to shiver, then an ominous cracking, rending sound, as the main and foremasts went over the side, carrying with them, alas, nearly all the poor fellows who were lying out on the yardarms.

Nearly all, for three were happily able, through being nearest the mast, to get clear and reach the deck at

the instant the vessel struck, and three more clambered aboard again, but no fewer than fourteen were lost.

Once more the *Wombat's* crew exhibited the best qualities of the highly-trained seaman. Order after order was given and immediately obeyed. Water-tight bulkheads were closed : the carpenter hurried to test the well ; gangs were promptly at work cutting away the wreckage of the two masts, while others cleared the boats and stood in readiness to lower away if unhappily it should be found necessary to leave the ship. At the first alarm the doctor and chaplain respectively were despatched to allay the fears of the saloon and steerage passengers, and in this they were entirely successful.

A quarter of an hour later Captain Fraser, entering the saloon said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you heartily for your calm demeanour. Our position is serious, but not so bad as at first appeared. The ship is hard and fast upon ice. She has not, as I feared, struck a berg ; but is wedged firmly upon a floe, and we may possibly be obliged to abandon her and, taking to the boats, make for the Crozet Islands, where provisions are specially stored. In that case we shall be compelled to live ashore for a time ; but not for long, as ever since the loss of the *Strathmore* in 1875 many steamers make a point of sighting the islands to ascertain if shipwrecked persons are ashore there. If you will follow my advice you will all go to bed and get a night's rest. Nothing can now be done but wait for daylight, when the fog will probably lift and I can decide upon what steps are necessary. We may be thankful that this did not occur two days ago in the height of the gale."

Morning was hailed with relief by every one on board

the *Wombat*. Ralph and Carew were early on deck, indeed the former had spent a busy and anxious night with his patients, only snatching a few moments' sleep. As Captain Fraser foretold, the fog had practically disappeared. The sun rose upon a remarkable scene. To the southward, as far as the horizon, were hundreds of small icebergs, upon which the sunlight played with exquisite effect, while stretching away from the ship to the nearest of the bergs was a floe several miles in circumference.

Upon the edge of this floe the vessel had struck and was firmly embedded, and when the two friends reached the side they found the Captain and first and second officers with several of the hands standing on the ice around the bows, and responding to the Captain's invitation they joined the group.

" You see here, gentlemen, what has occurred," said the Captain. " Mercifully the outer edge of the floe was very rotten, and the ship drove through it and slid upwards. As it was we lost two masts and fourteen good men, but had the ice been hard the ship and every living soul would have gone down. Here we are firm and fast until we can either dig ourselves out, or blast the ice away with charges of gunpowder, and with that array of ugly bergs to the southward I'm disposed to leave well alone for the present. Were we in clear water at this moment we are helpless without our masts, and with all these bergs knocking about we should be in deadly peril. So make up your minds to remain here while new spars are got on the ship, then, though the poor *Wombat* will only be a lame duck, we'll get her out of this floe and make the best of our way to Port Adelaide. You gentlemen must do your utmost to keep up the passengers' spirits. They

can come over the side and walk or play games on the ice : anything you like, provided they don't get fits of the blues. How are your patients, by the way, doctor?"

" Poor 'lamps' is sinking. Mr. Beveridge is still in exactly the same state, but is likely, I think, to recover consciousness. The others are all doing well."

* * * * *

At dawn on Saturday morning, the last day of November, 18—, the look-out man in the signal station at Cape Borda, the western extremity of Kangaroo Island, sighted in the offing a large vessel of peculiarly nondescript rig. At sunrise the glass made clear to him that she was a ship of heavy tonnage, working slowly towards St. Vincent's Gulf under fore and main jury-masts. An instant later he noticed signal-flags being run up to the mizen gaff, and turning the pages of Marryatt's code, gave a start and an exclamation of amazement and pleasure which speedily brought his mates to his side. It was hard to credit the evidence so plainly before their eyes, but in another moment an answering signal fluttered in the morning breeze, and the electric current was rapping out the startling news to the clerk at Port Adelaide that the *Wombat* had "made her number." Shortly afterwards she was picked up by a couple of tugs and a few hours later the "lame duck" was safely berthed in the inner harbour, where vast crowds of people who had poured in by train from the capital lined the wharves and cheered themselves hoarse in welcoming passengers, captain, officers and crew of the gallant ship which had so long been regarded as a total loss.

Already the great news had been flashed to England, and the first person to board the ship as she was brought alongside the wharf was a nimble telegraph

messenger, who placed in Captain Fraser's hand congratulatory cablegrams from owners and underwriters, couched in terms so laudatory as to bring a warm glow to the good man's cheek, and the colour deepened when Lloyd's agent wrung his hand warmly, saying, "Captain, you've accomplished a great feat, and every seaman will be proud of you."

Ralph's first care was to telegraph to his parents, while Carew cabled to his mother. Then the doctor conveyed the invalid Mr. Beveridge by train and carriage to the hospital, where, by telegram from the port to the chief medical officer, he had secured a private room for his patient.

"And here I'll say goodbye, Mr. Beveridge," said he, "or rather *au revoir*, as my parents are expecting me. But I leave you with perfect confidence. You are in thoroughly competent hands, and you will have every possible care and attention. Dr. Mortimer is a most able and skilful physician. He thinks with me that you ought to be quite strong enough in another month to bear the journey to Bannockburn, and I can promise you a warm welcome when you get there early in the new year."

"Goodbye, my dear doctor. Be assured I look forward to the proposed visit with sincere pleasure."

Ralph had scarcely left the building when Mr. Beveridge rang for the nurse and asked for writing materials. Presently he handed her a note, requesting that it might be delivered immediately by messenger.

Within twenty minutes a gentleman rode up to the hospital followed by a groom, and, enquiring for Mr. Beveridge, was ushered into his apartment.

"Why, my dear Jack," exclaimed the visitor, "what on earth is the meaning of this masquerade? Why

Mr. Beveridge? Why didn't you let me know you were coming? And why are you in hospital? I understand from your note that you have been hurt, but how has it all happened?"

"There, there, Edward," laughed the invalid. "I remembered your propensity for pouring forth an avalanche of questions, so I was ready for you. You have just asked me five, for I marked them off on my fingers. Briefly, I am travelling *incognito* for the sake of quiet. I came out in the *Wombat*, but we met with disaster, and I have to thank a young doctor that I'm here at all, and it was he who installed me in these most comfortable quarters."

"In the *Wombat*, you say? Then the doctor you speak of must surely have been Ralph Grant."

"The same, do you know him?"

"Well no, not personally, for he has been in England for eight years; but I know his people very well indeed. His father is one of the most public-spirited men in the Colony, and I have several times stayed at Bannockburn, his splendid place up the Murray. In fact I was there last month for the consecration of a fine church and the opening of an infirmary which he has erected on his estate. From all I have heard the son must be a splendid fellow. They were terribly upset by his non-appearance."

"He *is* a splendid fellow," emphatically responded Mr. Beveridge. "I am proud to reckon him amongst my friends. He has kindly asked me to stay at Bannockburn, and I hope to go there as soon as I'm fit to travel."

"It will be a delightful trip for you, Jack," said the visitor, "but won't you come to us first?"

"I think not my dear fellow, if you will excuse me.

It is my whim to be here unrecognized, and you know your aide-de-camp, Cameron, was on my staff for a time and would know me at once."

" Well, well, let it be as you wish, but we should have been delighted to entertain you."

Mr. Beveridge made such excellent progress that at the end of a week his removal to a hotel was permitted. Drives were at first taken. Then came a day when the gentleman who had been his daily companion arrived with a groom leading a spare horse, and the erstwhile invalid mounted amid Hector's wild demonstrations of delight, and, accompanied by his friend, rode leisurely through the streets and out into the open country.

" I trust the effort is not beyond your strength, Jack," said the Governor—for, as the reader has probably inferred, it was he who was so solicitous for Mr. Beveridge's welfare.

" On the contrary, I am feeling quite my own man again. Remember it is more than five months since I was last on horseback, and the exercise is putting new life into me. However, as the doctor was so particular in insisting that the first ride should not exceed an hour, I must be obedient, for doubtless he knows best. So let us have a few minutes' canter along this sward and then we'll trot leisurely back to the hotel, where you will join me at luncheon."

While sipping their coffee on the balcony outside Mr. Beveridge's sitting-room, the guest, after smoking in silent abstraction for some time, was startled from his reverie by a slap on the knee and the playful remark, "A penny for your thoughts, my dear Edward."

" Ah, Jack, I was thinking of you. I suppose you are really set on this visit to Bannockburn ? "

" Most certainly I have taken a strong liking to that fine young fellow, Grant, and his friend 'the parson,' as we called him on board, and I should greatly like to make the acquaintance of his parents and sister, to whom he seems devotedly attached. You surely have no objection to raise to my going ? "

" Far from it, I'm sure it would be the very thing for you, for they are most charming people, and quite princely in their hospitality. No, my dear old Jack, forgive your boyhood's friend, but I was just wondering whether that said sister—or adopted sister—would cast her spell over you, for she is as fascinating as she is beautiful, and of rare goodness to boot. It occurred to me that conceivably you might find in the Australian bush the solace your life has lacked for so many years."

" Thank you, Edward. I know it is only the truest friendship which prompts you to say this; but no other, however endowed with the graces you attribute to Miss Grant, could take the place of the dear one whom I have lost, but who lives enshrined in my heart as truly as she lives, and waits for me, in Paradise. Besides, unless I greatly misunderstood the signs, it is probable that my young friend the doctor will himself marry this girl who, while by courtesy styled Miss Grant, is of course no relation.

" I am free to confess to you, old friend, that the brief intercourse I had with those two admirable young men during our voyage from England has given me a truer estimate of things. As you yourself know, the stroke which fell upon me in my early manhood was indignantly resented. I utterly refused to bow beneath the Divine hand which had dealt or permitted the blow, and during all the intervening years my heart has, I fear, been in declared rebellion against God. Amid

the duties of a strenuous life I have sought to stifle the persistent strivings of the Holy Spirit, and have endeavoured to avoid intimacy with earnest Christian people.

"Coming out here by sailing ship, with the idea of securing strict privacy, I was extremely mortified to find myself in a perfect nest of active evangelism, and strongly, and I fear rudely, resented this upsetting of my plans. But, my dear Edward, I can now only feel that it was the mercy of God to me to place me on board that ship, mercy for which I shall thank Him to the end of my days."

"You have interested me exceedingly, Jack, and I thank you for thus opening your heart," responded his friend. "And now, as I understand you wish to reach Bannockburn as soon as possible, and it is important that all needless fatigue should be avoided, I shall be glad if you will start with me the day after to-morrow. You will thus have the advantage of my special train as far as the most northerly point of the railway, and you can travel on with me by easy stages to the station where I shall be visiting, and thence it will be quite simple to get across country to Bannockburn, if you have really set your heart upon spending Christmas there."

"Many thanks ; I will gratefully accept your escort for I should certainly like to antedate my visit, although I'm not expected before the New Year."

CHAPTER XIII.

"God gave all men all earth to love,
But since our hearts are small,
Ordained for each, one spot should prove
Belovéd over all."

—Kipling.

WELCOME HOME !

SUNSET had long passed. The watchers on the verandah were almost beginning to fear that after all, some untoward incident had occurred to baulk Ralph of his announced purpose of reaching home that day, and themselves of according him the joyous reception they had prepared.

Mr. Grant had just dropped disconsolately into a seat after restlessly pacing to and fro and exclaiming for the twentieth time, "What *can* be delaying him?" when Enid's upraised finger imposed silence, and the next moment a distinct "coo-eh" sounded faintly but unmistakably on the still night air.

"Ah, I wasn't mistaken," she exclaimed, "I thought I heard the hail once before, daddy dear, only the noise of your footsteps drowned it." Then quickly running to the rope which hung beside the porch, she gave repeated vigorous pulls, and the great bell clanged forth a peal which served both to summon the domestics and to apprise the oncoming traveller that his intimation had fallen on expectant ears.

And now once more the "coo-eh" call rang loud and clear from the edge of the wood. Then the lights of the swiftly advancing buggy flashed into view for an instant before being again hidden behind the dense shrubberies; so while dogs barked a deafening chorus

of welcome, and servants hastened from all parts of the house and outbuildings, the waiting family group moved to the steps of the porch, Enid and her parents well in advance, to greet the traveller.

While the buggy was still concealed in the evergreens Mr. Grant called loudly, "Mick! have you brought Mr. Ralph?" but no reply reached him, and Enid was just saying "Why, daddy, of course he has, that coo-eh was certainly not Mick's," when the buggy swept into the broad straight drive before the house, and the Squatter received his answer as the handsome bays, driven tandem at their top speed, were brought steaming to their haunches at the foot of the steps, and Ralph, looking bronzed and well in the blaze of light from the house, threw the reins to a waiting groom, and vaulting from his high perch amid the cheers of the crowd, was instantly enfolded in his mother's arms. So prolonged was the maternal embrace that the Squatter cried, "Come awa, laddie, come awa! and let me see if you've grown too old to kiss your father."

"No, indeed," said Ralph, gently disengaging himself from his mother's caress, "to whatever age I grow I shall always be ready to kiss you so long as you call me 'laddie.' It's good to hear the word, and oh! it's good to be at home again."

Released by his father, he turned to find himself confronted by a tall, lovely girl of nineteen. He paused, hesitated, positively blushed. Then as the radiant face before him became clouded with keen disappointment and a look of reproach, the poor fellow utterly puzzled and disconcerted, turned helplessly to his mother as though seeking an introduction.

Mrs. Grant was intensely amused, but before she could come to her son's rescue the Squatter had grasped

the situation, and cried, "So that's it! Did you really expect to find your adopted sister arrayed in short frock and pinafore, exactly as when you left her eight years ago? Well, well, I suppose I must effect a formal introduction. Enid, my bairn, this strange tall gentleman is the Dr. Ralph Grant with whom you have been in frequent communication; but who apparently cannot recognize his fair correspondent. Dr. Grant, this is our dear and only daughter."

But the momentary embarrassment had passed, and Mr. Grant's raillery was unheard by the two who affectionately embraced.

Leading Ralph into the porch, Enid presented him to Helen Tennant and her parents, then with a mischievous smile she invited his attention to three pairs of feet protruding beneath a curtain in the hall, and challenged him to identify the owners.

Entering readily into the fun, Ralph made several guesses, remarking that one thing alone was obvious, one pair of feet supported the body of a full-grown man, while the others were the feet of ladies—"unless of course you have three little children behind the curtain masquerading in the boots of their elders."

"No," laughed the girl, "there is no deception of that simple kind. You were quite right in your identification as far as it went. Try again."

Suddenly Ralph went down upon his knees and examined more closely. Then seizing one of the big boots in a firm grip, remarked, "For my part I fear I am somewhat extravagant in my footgear, and when a boot gets damaged I give away the pair and buy new ones, but I once stayed in the house of a gentleman who prided himself upon never casting off old friends, even if they had grown old and deformed.

Now, Uncle Marmaduke, you are unmasked ; you have given Enid away through wearing the same pair of dress boots you had on when we chased those supposed burglars last June."

The curtain being drawn aside, Ralph greeted the relatives from whom he had parted six months before, and learned that they had already been at Bannockburn five weeks, having travelled out by one of the Orient mail boats in response to an urgent invitation to spend Christmas in Australia.

Meanwhile a great crowd had patiently awaited the chance of greeting "Master Ralph." First came Mr. Webb, who had ridden in on hearing the good news, and having offered his sincere congratulations, was desired to hasten back and bring Mrs. Webb to join the family dinner-party. After him came Angus, who was much gratified by the warmth of the clasp and the kindly utterances of the "wee bairn" of six feet. Then there was a prolonged handshaking with the older indoor servants and station hands who had known the young doctor before he went to England. From this occupation Ralph was roused by his father's call, "Come, my dear lad, let me pilot you to your room, for dinner will be ready in half an hour and you have the dust of the Waramba road upon you."

No sooner had they gone than Enid pounced upon the coachman, who had just completed the transfer of portmanteaux and other packages from the buggy to the hall.

"Mick," she asked, "why didn't you answer the master when he called to you ? You know he doesn't like to be kept waiting."

"Shure, miss, an' don't oi know that same ? But faith, it was mesilf was puzzled phwat to say, for the

masther called 'Mick, have ye brought Misther Ralph?' whin all the toime 'twas Misther Ralph had brought *me*. Ye see, Miss Enid, nothin' wud contint the young gintelman but he must handle the ribbins himsif, an' bedad he jist dhruv as if to the manner born, an' we came all the way home for all the worrld loike a young whirlwind. So ye see, Miss, though the buggy was two hundred yards an' better from the porch whin the masther axed me that same question, we'd pulled up at the door afore oi'd toime to think av me answer, an' that's the truth, Miss Enid, avourneen."

The girl laughed heartily at Mick's shrewd method of escaping possible censure, and greatly pleased the good fellow by saying, "Well, Mick, you know Mr. Ralph was always fond of being among the horses before he went away, and he hasn't spent the last eight years in a country where there are none."

"Indade, an' don't oi remember that, Miss, but all the same it isn't ivery wan can dhrive tandem for twinty-foive moiles through the bush, widout mintioning that he'd bin dhrivin' the coach for siveral hours, all along o' the coachman havin' sprained the left arrm av him wid liftin' a passenger's portmantle. And it's mesilf's both proud an' plazed, for didn't oi give Misther Ralph some av his first lessons whin he was but a little gossoon?"

"That is so, Mick, and you have every reason to be satisfied with your pupil."

The sound of the gong put an end to the colloquy, and Enid hastened into the drawing-room, where a few minutes later the guest of the evening joined the party, and Ah Fang announced dinner.

Mick gazed a moment admiringly after the retreating figure of his beloved young "Misthress," then faced

about suddenly as Angus very deliberately voiced the comment, "Hech, sirs, but she's fu' o' the milk o' human kindness."

"Full av *phwat*, did yez say? Milk av human kindness indade! Sorra a dhrap av that same has she got, the purty darlint."

"Hoot, mon," cried Angus, "it ill becomes *ye* of all men to say that, seein' hoo muckle the bonnie young leddy hae done for *ye*."

"Whoi, yez dull-headed Scot, don't yez see that's jist the rayson fer me sayin' it? An' oi replate niver a dhrap o' milk is there annyway."

"Weel, weel, I ken ye're given to saying strange things, Mick, but what ye mean me to understand I canna fathom."

"Mane yez to ondersthand, indade! Bedad, Angus, a dale av use my maning! It's me firm opinion that ye're as incapable av ondersthanding as me ould mother's red pig. Yez poor miserable craythur to talk av *milk* indade! Whoi it's the richest crame, ye red-haired Scot! Crame as rich an' pure an' swate as iver was skimmed in a County Cork dairy."

Meanwhile, in the dining room, Mr. Grant was saying, "Now Ralph, dear laddie, we are all agog to hear your story, and a thrilling tale I expect you have to tell us, but I lay my commands upon this company that the narration is not to commence until the meal is over, as otherwise I foresee that you, poor fellow, will get no dinner at all."

"That is very considerate of you, father, which reminds me that I have been rather *inconsiderate*. I hope I didn't do wrong in telegraphing from Adelaide when we landed. The uppermost, perhaps the only thought, in my mind was to relieve your anxiety as

quickly as possible, and I'm afraid I didn't stop to consider that my doing so would put you to considerable expense."

"Tut, tut, dear lad, you did quite right. It's true we've no nearer wire than Waramba, which, as you know, is twenty-five miles. But what of that? If the fee for a mounted messenger had been ten times what it is, don't you think I would gladly have paid it to get news of my boy? What say you, Tennant, don't you agree with me?"

"Entirely. What with floods and drought and the perennial rabbit pest we colonials are not the pastoral princes we are popularly supposed to be, but we're not quite so reduced in circumstances as to grudge paying for good news when we have the chance."

"Aye," said Mr. Grant, "and in the case in point it was good news indeed, even of one alive from the dead; but after all" he added, with a merry twinkle, "Ralph's conscientious concern is beside the point, for the telegram did not cost me a single bawbee. True, I gave the messenger a somewhat liberal tip, though I should have done that whatever the official fee; but as a matter of fact there was no fee at all!"

"Why, how was that?" exclaimed Ralph.

"Oh, it was very simple. You see, all Adelaide was buzzing with the great news, and the Premier, a dear old friend of mine, took it into his head to send me an official telegram of congratulation on behalf of himself and his colleagues. The Governor, too, was pleased to telegraph, and the good bishop, away on tour just then, heard the report and joined in the general felicitation. Now it so happened that all these telegrams reached Waramba on the heels of yours, and as the government despatch came free, the postmaster sent the whole batch

over by the same rider, and a considerable flutter was caused by their arrival, as you may readily understand."

" Yes, indeed, I can well understand what a revulsion of feeling there must have been, and how your sorrow was turned into joy. All the same I am relieved to find that I was not blamed for telegraphing."

" Not *blamed*, dear lad ! You would have been severely and rightly blamed had you done otherwise, so let us consider that point settled and change the subject, though I may mention that had you reached Adelaide a week later we might have conversed over the wires, for I'm having the telephone brought through from Waramba, and the work will be completed in a few days "

" Well," said Ralph, " you were speaking just now of losses, Mr. Tennant. Of course I've heard a good deal in letters, and through the English newspapers ; but no doubt there is much for me to learn now that I'm on the spot. For example one mail brought me letters from father, mother, and Enid ; these letters spoke in such decidedly hyperbolic terms as to almost make me suspect that the writers were attempting to hoax me."

" No, Mr. Ralph, there was certainly no question of hoaxing. Whatever your parents and Enid may have told you about the floods cannot have been in excess of the bald reality, as known to many of us, and I can promise you some interesting and exciting yarns from all quarters."

" You will find a ready listener," replied Ralph, " but please don't address me as ' Mr.' I was plain Ralph to everybody before I went to England, and though eight years have added to my stature, I don't think either my inches or my great store of learning

entitle me to be dubbed Mr., at all events in present company."

"Well then," remarked Mrs. Tennant, "by all means you shall be called Ralph by all of us. Indeed you have always been Ralph during your absence, only I suppose your height and stately bearing impressed us. Though, by the way, we were wrong in any case in calling you *Mr.*, for I understand you have taken your London M.D."

"Yes, that is so, Mrs. Tennant, but degrees and diplomas are not to count in the home circle, if you please."

"And now," interposed Mr. Grant, "if the ladies will permit, we will adjourn direct to the Lecture Hall. We want, Ralph, to have at all events an outline of your adventures. Remember that we received your letter in August, bearing the Ventnor postmark, and from that time we had no direct news until your telegram reached us last Saturday evening. Of course your ship was announced in the newspapers as having called at Cape Town, but that was all, so, as your nautical friends would say, we have a lot of leeway to make up. We expected you to reach Adelaide in October, and it is now December"

"Well, father, I fear that it cannot be more than, as you say, a mere outline. There is so much to tell, that the best plan will be to give you a synopsis of the whole story rather than a detailed instalment. We shall have so much time together, that it will be an easy matter to fill in the outline afterwards."

"Quite right," said the Squatter, "only, before you begin, I may tell you that I felt it right to consider the domestics, and also the clerk of the works, and the workmen engaged upon the new Vicarage, who have

shewn such warm and constant sympathy in our trial, and have shared our anxiety, so I have invited those who are able to do so to come and hear your narrative."

"With all my heart, father. I learned from Mick, during the drive, how real had been the feeling evinced, and I shall be very glad to have the larger audience. But your mentioning the Vicarage reminds me that I've not heard the name of your Vicar."

"Ah," said his father, "then you will be pleased to know that your old tutor, Mr. Sewell, has been inducted. He was called away yesterday to see a dying relative, or he would of course have been with us to-night ; but he will be back to-morrow."

"Good old Sewell," said Ralph emphatically, "I'm very glad he's got it."

Passing from the dining-room to the seats reserved for them in the Hall, the party found themselves among an assemblage of fully a hundred and fifty persons. For not only were all the indoor and outdoor servants present, but also many stockmen who had ridden in for the occasion and would have to ride back to their huts when the function was over. Then came a compact phalanx of stonemasons, joiners and labourers, headed by the clerk of the works, while at the back of all sat a group of fifteen sundowners who, at their own earnest request, had been admitted.

The entrance of the family evoked a burst of cheering, and as soon as this had subsided the Squatter rose and said, "My friends, many of you remember my son. All of you have known the anxiety and sorrow of the past two months, and it is but fitting that you, who have been so thoughtful and sympathetic, and have shared so loyally our hopes and fears, should listen with us to the story my dear son has to tell."

Addressing an attentive and deeply interested audience, Ralph related the thrilling tale of peril, accident, and death which has already been recorded in these pages.

At times, during the fifty minutes occupied, the strain upon his hearers was evidenced by their almost breathless attention, punctuated here and there by exclamations of pity or wonder. And when at length the speaker ceased, the general sense of relief found appropriate expression in the hearty singing of Pastor Rinckart's glorious hymn, "Now thank we all our God," to the accompaniment of the organ and Mr. Grant's cornet.

Mr. Webb then rose, and in suitable and very touching terms expressed the heartfelt congratulations of all the employés upon Dr. Grant's safe return, and the hope that he would remain at Bannockburn and be in and out amongst them, at all events for some time to come. They could not forget that to him they owed the suggestion of an infirmary, which his father had so generously erected, and which was now awaiting its first patient. Then followed Corporal Jenkins, now the senior stockman, who had ridden from his hut, ten miles away, in order to be present. The good fellow was quite overcome with joy, and he greatly amused his hearers once or twice by slipping involuntarily into his native Welsh. On the second occasion he apologised very humbly, but at once raised general laughter by explaining that there could be no language so suited to expressing great gladness as the Welsh tongue, and averred his firm belief that, for this reason, Welsh would be the language of heaven !

"However," concluded he, "we are all delighted, English, Scots, Irish and Welsh, to have Master Ralph

back amongst us again, and we all praise God for what He has done for him, and pray that goodness and mercy may always follow him. Iss indeed!"

"Thanks, my friends," said the Squatter, "from my heart I thank you for all your kind feeling and good wishes, and I trust you will do justice to the supper which my wife tells me awaits you, and that you will all reach home safely. Good night!" And so, amid a chorus of 'good night' and cheers for the Squatter and his family, the company dispersed.

"By the way, Ralph," said Major Woodward, when the party reached the drawing-room, "I was nearly forgetting an important commission. The Vicar of Pershore dined with us during our last week at home, and entrusted this letter to my care for delivery to you. Its bulk suggests that he has very liberally carried out the promise he made to send you some more Worcestershire colloquialisms. He impressed upon me that he had taken special pains to select what he thought you would appreciate."

"Many thanks, uncle. I'm certain to appreciate anything from him, judging from the samples he gave us. I should say that careful selection was unnecessary, for all his stories were excellent: but I'll see what he writes."

"Dear Dr. Grant,"—the letter ran—"You were so good as to express appreciation of a few instances of local folk-lore when I had the pleasure of seeing you here in June, and I now venture to trouble you with some additional matter, in case you care to honour it with a place in your journal.

"My old gardener, whose quaint sayings amused you, has just been telling me, 'Moy roomatticks be wuss, zur! wuss nor ever, they be, all along o' they

cottages bein' in vlood's way. Us can't get no warmthship in they housen no 'ow.' Poor man, his many aches and pains don't improve his temper, and amongst his latest troubles is what he calls 'a bad abse' (abscess) at the root of one of his few remaining teeth. The old fellow's perversity increases his sufferings, for nothing will induce him to submit to medical treatment. He says, 'Oi reckon oi knaws a soight more nor they doctor chaps. When my chillun wuz young uns they wuz all took bad with the whoopin' cough ; an' oi ups an catches a haf dozen moice, noice fat uns, an' the missus her roasted 'em an' served 'em pipin' 'ot to th' chillun, with plenty o' pepper. Whoi bless 'ee, zur, they coughs wuz all gone insoide of a week, they wuz. Naw, ef oi'd called in th' doctor 'twud a bin months an' months afore 'e'd a cured 'em, an' arter all it 'ud a bin th' foine spring weather as done it and not the doctor at all !'

" ' Noa, zur, keep clear o' doctors, sez oi. Whoi, zur, they doant know what brings the pains, no more'n they knaws what cures 'em. Here was that there Dr. Roberts tryin' to gammon oi t'other day that moy abse wuz all along o' decayed tithe.'

" ' Decayed fiddlesticks, doctor,' sez oi. ' It wuz nothin' more nor less than moy darter Mary Ann throwin' fishbones on th' fire in th' washus, which any numskull knaws 'ull allus make the tithe ache. Ay, zur, an' not satisfied with givin' her old dad a bad abse, but she must go an' throw egg shells on th' fire as well, which everybody with a grain o' gumption knaws 'ull skeer the vowls off layin'. An' you may believe oi, zur, they blessed hens hav'n't laid nary a egg since she did it.'

At this point the reading was interrupted by the

peals of laughter which could no longer be suppressed, and Mr. Tennant exclaimed, " If these silly ideas are indeed cherished by the English peasantry, they can't be regarded as greatly superior in intelligence to the Australian natives."

" No, no," interposed Major Woodward, " don't be too severe, Tennant. Remember, superstition dies hard, spite of the strides of modern education ; but within the next generation the schoolmaster will have eradicated these foolish beliefs. Now, Ralph, go ahead with your reading."

" The half-dozen pages of sermon paper," proceeded the reader, " contain facts and incidents of local interest, and I hope you will not be wearied by their perusal."

Ralph glanced hastily at the enclosure, then exclaimed, " Well, I have no intention of wading through all this to-night, but if the ladies will allow me, I must just read aloud one paragraph which has caught my eye. Personally, I have hitherto, probably in common with every one in the room, supposed that the expression ' set the Thames on fire ' has referred to the river of that name, and was merely another form of the simple truism that one cannot achieve impossibilities. But I see from the Rector's manuscript that the true meaning is very different. The temse (spelt t-e-m-s-e) was, it appears, a wooden portion of the domestic corn-mill which in medieval times was found in every well-ordered household, and is still remembered by many old people. If the farm hand, or one of the maids, were ordered to grind some corn, and chanced to be caught by the housewife moving lazily, she would probably administer a severe cuffing, and exclaim reproachfully, ' You'll never set the temse on

fire.' Whereas a really hard worker, turning briskly, might, on the contrary, be compelled to slow down through the friction having ignited the temse."

"Very good indeed," commented Mr. Tennant, "that is a thoroughly reasonable explanation of a phrase which has always struck me as being meaningless and absurd. It is obviously the true form of the aphorism, and, unfortunately, is applicable to many so-called workers of modern days."

"Ha ! ha ! Tennant, you are evidently still feeling sore about those rabbiters," laughed Mr. Grant. "You probably wish you had lived in the days of the cuffing housewife of whom Ralph was reading."

"You're right, old friend," replied Mr. Tennant ; "the lazy rascals thoroughly deserved some such strong measures."

"Why, what is this I hear ?" cried Major Woodward. "Methought this was a land of energetic workers, and that all the drones were to be found in the old country."

"There are skulkers to be found everywhere, Major," replied Mr. Tennant, "and though many a man is compelled by his environment to work, and work hard, he will soon relapse into idle habits if the chance should offer. The fellows to whom Mr. Grant refers were employed by me to clear the rabbits off my run, at so much per thousand. As you are aware, the runs have recently been fenced with wire netting in sections, and it was the duty of the rabbiters to work one section until it was entirely freed from the pest, and then pass on to another, and so on seriatim until the whole estate was cleared. But the rascals knew on which side their bread was buttered, so after section No. 1 was declared free, they would quietly drop a few dozen rabbits over the fence on a dark night, so that-

by the time No. 2, or at most No. 3, was done with, No. 1 would be swarming, and the work had to be done over again. This went on for some time until I grew suspicious. They tried to make me believe the rabbits had burrowed beneath the fencing, but I knew that was impossible, and at last I surprised the blackguards at their game, and sent them packing. Then I employed my own people, and effectually banished the rabbits, although it involved a very heavy outlay."

"And didn't you prosecute the fellows who had preyed upon you?" asked the Major. "In England they would have promptly been laid by the heels for such malpractices."

"Why no, what was the use? In this thinly populated country it would have cost me a large sum to deal with them in that way. It would have been merely throwing good money after bad. But I had the satisfaction of confiscating their stock-in-trade, and also of refusing them a certificate, so they certainly would not be able to get further employment as easily as they would had they acted on the square."

"Mr. Tennant," said Ralph, changing the subject, "Enid tells me you are an enthusiastic entomologist, and that your collection of beetles is an unusually fine one."

"That is so, doctor; I've always been fond of the study, and from what your mother has shewn us here I find that you, too, were interested in it before you went to England."

"Yes, I was indeed, and while there I've had the opportunity of inspecting some of the most complete collections in the world, which has naturally whetted my appetite."

"Well, you must let me see the specimens you have

brought back with you, and some day I shall be glad to show you mine if you will honour us with a visit."

"I shall be delighted," said Ralph, "for I'm told that yours is the best collection in the Colonies."

"As to that I'm not sure, but it certainly is the finest in our own State of New South Wales. By the way, Miss Woodward, I had rather an exciting time when I was last out beetle hunting. You were asking the other day about the different species of snakes on this Continent, and were especially interested in carpet snakes. Now the black snake, though smaller, is a vicious reptile, as I've proved by more than one unpleasant experience. Well, the very last time I indulged in what some of my friends regard as a sort of harmless lunacy, I was staying at a friend's place, and having been out for several hours, had bagged some very fine specimens; but the evening was excessively hot, and finding the proximity of a creek an irresistible temptation, I undressed and plunged in for a swim. You can imagine how intensely refreshing the water was, and I would have given a good deal for the chance of prolonging my bath; but entertaining, as you do, a wholesome dread of snakes, you will sympathise with my feelings when presently I heard a sharp hissing within a couple of yards, and saw a fine vigorous specimen of the black snake evidently bent on accompanying me down stream. You may be sure I did not wait for a closer acquaintance, but turned off at right-angles and swam ashore. It was a merciful escape, for the creature might of course have bitten my head, the only portion above water, and the chances would have been all against recovery, although I was but a couple of miles or so away from my friend's house and assistance."

"Your stories, I notice, all end happily," said May, "so I don't mind hearing them, but I suppose there are instances in which people are bitten and do not recover."

"Most certainly there are, but I'm not going to tell you any gruesome tales, young lady, especially just before going to bed. You would certainly have nightmare and rouse the house by your shrieks."

"No, that I'm sure I shouldn't," laughed May; "but all the same I'll dispense with the sad stories, if you please, and be thankful that my own lot is cast in England, much as I admire this lovely country."

"Oh come, come," exclaimed her uncle, "I can't allow you to talk like that. One would imagine that we are overrun with snakes. There couldn't be a greater misconception. May I ask you, my dear, how many you've seen since you have been in Australia?"

"Why, none at all, uncle."

"Exactly, and when I tell you that I was recently told by a friend living near Adelaide that he had never seen a snake during all the thirty-five years he had spent in the Colony, you will perhaps realize that the snake bogey has been exploited far too freely by good people in England. Now, my dear, give me a kiss, and be off to dreamless sleep, for I'll be bound Ralph will give us all plenty of occupation to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIV.

“The breeze
Came whispering down, the wide up-slanting sea
Of fanning leaves in the descending rays
Danced dazzlingly, tingling as if the trees
Thrilled to the roots for very happiness.”

—Charles Harpur.

EAULIEU.

THE first days after Ralph's return were filled up from early morn until dinner-time with excursions in which the entire house party accompanied him. Very pleasant outings they were, in that wondrous Southern land where invitations to picnics in the summer season need not contain the proviso “weather permitting,” but can be fixed weeks beforehand with practical certainty of cloudless skies.

Naturally the first morning saw Ralph early astir, and enjoying a plunge in the lake, where he was greatly interested in noting the change which eight years had wrought in the appearance of the forest trees by which it was almost entirely surrounded. Then he critically examined the infirmary, entering it by a long subway from the house, and was gratified to see how thoroughly the work had been done, the building and all its appointments being in accordance with the very latest demands of science. In the provision of instruments, drugs and the many essentials of a perfect institution, he found that his father had expended money without stint, and warm were the thanks Mr. Grant received when father and son met at breakfast. But before that hour the whole household presented themselves in the new church, where the Squatter, in

the vicar's absence, read morning prayer, after which followed an inspection of the sacred edifice, with the exception of the tower, which was left for another occasion.

At breakfast the conversation again turned, at Ralph's suggestion, upon the troublous times by means of which Australian pastoralists had been learning so many valuable lessons.

"Yes," said Mr. Tennant, "the truth which the Laureate affirms of individual life and character in his wonderful lines :

'I held it truth, with him who sings
To one clear harp in divers tones,
That men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.'

is equally applicable to young States. Your father, Ralph, acted with wonderful foresight when, instead of putting all his eggs into one basket, he made such wise disposition of his estate, and so employed his capital as to preclude the possibility of either drought or flood bringing him to the verge of bankruptcy. Men who scoffed years ago at his extensive irrigated fruit plantations as the hobby of a hair-brained amateur, have lived to lament their lack of similar wisdom. While sheep in many districts were dying off by thousands, your father suffered less than any of us, because, as he couldn't carry the Murray waters into the further portions of his 250,000 acres, he spent money freely in artesian wells."

"Ah, yes, I'm very curious to see the working of these wells, father," said Ralph. "Can't we manage a picnic to the nearest ? "

"Yes, certainly we can, for the nearest is only twenty-five miles away, but the farthest of the three is fully seventy."

"And," resumed Mr. Tennant, "when you see those bores, and the astounding results produced over large areas of practically waterless country, you won't be surprised to learn that when first I saw them—unfortunately it was after I had lost twenty thousand sheep—I promptly took a leaf out of your father's book and expended five thousand pounds in boring operations. The first two attempts were unsuccessful, for we tapped salt water; but the engineers persevered, and the third bore gave us a grand supply. But, as I was saying, where your father has scored during all these years has been in dividing his interests. Sheep, cattle, horses, fruit—not to mention his extensive plantations of forest trees—all these industries have combined to render Alexander Grant a name to conjure with, and to attract many landowners and lessees to Bannockburn to see with their own eyes how the thing is done."

"Gently there, Tennant," interposed the Squatter, "you are allowing your natural eloquence to run away with you."

"But indeed, Mr. Grant," said Helen, "it's all quite true. I've heard the subject raised at our own table many times"—

"Aye, by your father, my dear," laughed the Squatter.

"No, I mean by guests. People have very often spoken of Bannockburn in terms of praise and admiration, so you mustn't think that father is exaggerating. It was especially so when the big floods were out. People were saying that Bannockburn could not suffer because you had made enormous reservoirs where you *wanted* the water and built dykes to protect the land where it *wasn't* wanted."

"Bravo!" interjected Major Woodward. "Your father is to be congratulated on having such an able supporter, Miss Helen."

"And did you have great boating picnics during the floods?" enquired May.

"No, unfortunately we couldn't, for you see at ordinary times the river is twenty miles from us, so we had no boat, and couldn't take advantage of our opportunity. All my boating has been done here. Enid taught me how to row, and sail and swim."

"Now," interposed Mrs. Grant, "what is decided for to-day?"

"Would it be an impertinence," enquired her son, "if I ventured to suggest a water trip? The old *Bruce* was still in commission when I left for England, and the *Caledonia*, if I may judge from the home letters, is in every way a better vessel."

"Any amendment to be moved to that proposal?" asked the Squatter.

"Ah, none! Then I declare the resolution carried *nem. con.* You see here, my son, an instance of the advantage we shall gain from the telephone. In another couple of days we shall be able to telephone down to the wharf. This morning a mounted messenger must go. Now, Lilian, are we only to lunch on board, or shall you expect us to dine also?"

"Oh, no. I'll give instructions for everything to be sent down to the wharf for luncheon, but we'll dine at home at eight o'clock."

As the party broke up, Enid seized upon Ralph with the enquiry, "Did you notice much difference in Angus?"

"Indeed I did. He has aged rapidly. He ought to keep very quiet."

"Ah, I thought you would say so : but he won't hear of it. He says it would break his 'auld heart' to lead an idle life."

"That I can quite believe. But his 'auld heart' will play him false if he tries to work a worn-out pumping engine at high pressure," responded the doctor, grimly.

The river picnic was immensely enjoyed by every one, perhaps most of all by the doctor. The first nineteen years of his life had been spent amid these beauteous scenes, and eight years absence had whetted his appetite to such an extent that quite a score of times during the day he exclaimed, "Oh, this *is* delightful," until at last, as Enid handed him some tea during the run home, she playfully withdrew the cup because he had omitted to repeat the new formula.

Two items of news, each important in its way, were communicated on their return, one being that the electricians having completed their task within contract time, the telephone was now fully installed, the other an urgent request from the head gardener's house-keeper that Dr. Grant would go to see her master directly he returned, as he had fallen in a faint during the afternoon.

The failing health of his devoted servant and true friend, Angus, had for several months caused Mr. Grant grave concern. The old man had at first pooh-poohed all attempts on the part of Mrs. Grant and Enid to persuade him to spare himself a little.

"Na, na," said he, "ever syne I was a wee bit laddie, I've kenned *w-o-r-k* spells health, an' I'll no begin to skulk noo that I'm nearin' the end o' ma journey."

Then the Squatter intervened, pointed out that

the staff of gardeners was sufficiently large and experienced to obviate the necessity of any further active supervision by Angus, and peremptorily insisted that he should retire upon a pension equalling the aggregate of his present emoluments. But so grieved was the head gardener at this proposal of his beloved "maister" to dispense with his services, that he forthwith gave the best possible evidence of age and infirmity by sinking upon a garden seat, burying his head in his hands, and bursting into tears. This was altogether too much for his kind-hearted employer, who promptly patted his shoulder, assured him that things should go on exactly as hitherto, and retired precipitately to confess to his wife and Enid that he had been vanquished.

But upon Ralph's arrival and examination there was a change in the old man's attitude. He realized that the doctor had diagnosed his condition, and saw through his flimsy defence, so he promptly capitulated. "Weel, weel, laddie," said he, "I nursed ye in ma twa arms yance, but noo ye're ane too mony for me, sae I'll jest be obedient an' say na mair aboot it."

Ralph had been greatly impressed by the tact and efficiency of Sister Millicent, the nurse whom he had seen placed in charge of Mr. Beveridge at the Adelaide Hospital, and almost the first use to which the newly-installed telephone was put was to ring her up and to offer her the charge of the infirmary as soon as she could be released. She replied that Mr. Beveridge had already left the hospital, and was staying in a hotel, and she gladly accepted the proffered post and would travel north immediately.

"You see," said Ralph, when communicating this news to the assembled family, "it is all very well for

Enid and May to be with Angus during the daytime as they suggest, but he ought to be cared for at night as well, and it is best to have a good trained nurse. His housekeeper is too old."

"By all means," said the Squatter. "Let everything be done to comfort and help the old man. He deserves that every possible consideration be shewn him."

The next day was Sunday, and at the new church three services were held, each well attended. At present there was but one bell, which sounded its daily summons, but a full peal had, twelve months before, been ordered from England, and the bells were now on their way up the Murray, and would shortly be hung in the imposing belfry tower.

At five o'clock on Monday morning every one was roused; half-an-hour later the breakfast gong sounded, and soon after six o'clock ten horses were at the door.

Pack-horses and servants had started an hour earlier, so that after three hours' easy riding the party found a second breakfast awaiting them upon a pine-crowned eminence, at the foot of which flowed a clear sparkling stream, the last natural watercourse to be seen for two hundred miles. Two miles to the southward this stream passed into a great reservoir some ten acres in extent, surrounded on all sides by a belt of Monterey pines (*pinus insignis*), a method of water conservation which had been adopted wherever possible throughout the Bannockburn property.

After resting and watering the horses, another hour's leisurely trot upon parched ground with very scanty herbage brought them in touch with the first evidences of scientific irrigation. The closing stage of the journey was by the side of one of the long main channels from which smaller lateral canals issued at right-angles

and were lost to sight in the far distance on either side.

"There, Ralph, will this please you?" enquired Major Woodward. "Your father brought me out here three weeks ago, and I was altogether lost in admiration. If it be true that the man who makes two blades of grass grow where but one grew before is a benefactor of his species, what are we to say of him who converts a waterless desert into rich pasture and heavily productive fruit plantations?"

"I don't wonder, Uncle Marmaduke, at your being so ecstatic. It's a grand sight. Many a time have I ridden in this direction in the years when, as you say, it was a waterless desert, and though I've known all my life that my father was not only an enthusiast upon forestry and fruit growing, but also well able to put his ideas into practice, I certainly wasn't prepared for such a metamorphosis as this. It's a veritable garden of Eden."

"Right, doctor," said Mr. Tennant, "and remember that what your father has effected here can be done with equal success elsewhere. There are already signs that several of the States will move vigorously in the matter of irrigation, and we shall certainly see before many years have passed large areas under fruit, which to-day are growing nothing more valuable than mallee scrub. It's sure to come, and it will mean healthy and profitable employment to thousands."

"I see, Mr. Tennant, that my father's fencing bill must have been a heavy one," said Ralph. "I noticed there was wire netting extending for miles when we entered the irrigated district, and we have passed thorough quite twenty gates in the strained wire fencing since then."

"Yes, the cost has been heavy," said Mr. Grant,

" but such expenditure is amply justified. If it were not for fences we could not deal with sheep, horses and cattle so successfully upon an elaborate system of rotation : and as for wire netting, it is sunk beneath the surface for twelve inches all round the enclosed lands, or the rabbits wouldn't leave us a single blade of grass. We're getting the better of them by systematic fencing and wholesale poisoning ; but it was a bad day for Australia when the first few couples were brought over from England. The cost of combating the pest has been prodigious, both to the States and to individuals."

" Yes, I can form some idea of what you are exposed to," said Ralph, " from what I saw and heard on the coach drive from Morgan to Waramba. At one point where we suddenly emerged from the dense bush into open country, the rabbits were so thick upon the ground that the hill in front of us seemed to be actually moving, as the thousands of bunnies scattered to right and left. One of my fellow-travellers was a Government Inspector of Runs, and he improved the occasion by telling me marvellous stories of the damage done, and of the many devices resorted to by distracted pastoralists."

" Well, whatever marvels you heard were probably quite within the truth," replied his father, " but we are nearly at our destination, and yonder comes Mr. Melrose, my local manager, and a very clever, capable man. But who is that riding out with him ? "

Simultaneously with the Squatter's enquiry came an ejaculation of surprise from May, who, with Enid and Helen Tennant, was riding a little in advance. " Why, Ralph," she cried, " there's Mr. Carew ; did you expect to find him here ? "

"No, indeed," he replied; "I thought he'd come by rail from Melbourne to Echuca, and then by coach to Waramba, where I could have met him."

A minute later greetings were being exchanged, and Carew explained that having concluded his visit to the dean, he had travelled north in company with another visitor, a clergyman who was bound on a mission to the natives beyond Mr. Grant's property: that on his arriving at Eaulieu on Saturday evening, Mr. Melrose had persuaded him to remain over Sunday in order to conduct services for the benefit of the hands, and continue his journey to Bannockburn on Monday; but the arrival of a mounted messenger that morning announcing the coming of the Squatter and his party cancelled this arrangement. Meanwhile his baggage had gone by coach to Waramba to be expressed to Bannockburn.

"Well, Melrose," said the Squatter, "I'm very pleased you were able to secure Mr. Carew's help, only I hope you didn't overwork him. He's here for his health, you know."

"I may have been below par when I left England, Mr. Grant," said Carew, "but the voyage, and a week in this grand air, have combined to make a new man of me."

"Aye, your looks don't pity you," laughed the Squatter, "and I'm glad you give this country some of the credit. Heartiest welcome to Bannockburn. Though you are not yet quite on the doorstep, yet a small matter of twenty-five miles doesn't count for much in Australia.

"I hope," interposed Mrs. Grant, "that you will thoroughly recover your health during your stay with us. We will all do our best to make the visit a pleasant one."

"By the way, Mr. Melrose," she added, "I trust our coming in this sudden fashion hasn't been too great a tax upon your sister."

"Certainly not, Mrs. Grant, Grace is quite in her element when busy. I assure you she was delighted when I told her to prepare luncheon for ten visitors: but there she is on the verandah to speak for herself. She doesn't look very depressed."

Grace Melrose well deserved her name. *Petite*, animated, intensely unselfish: nothing pleased her better than to be called upon to render service to others. And now she played the part of gracious hostess to perfection, as she received her guests and convoyed them to the cool drawing-room, a daintily-furnished apartment facing south and opening upon the wide verandah which completely surrounded the house. The view from the French windows was very lovely and fully justified Ralph's use of the term Garden of Eden as applicable to the irrigated lands generally. For here, before their eyes, the visitors beheld what marvellous floral effects can be obtained by intense culture when practised by skilled hands in such perfect conditions as were at Mr. Melrose's command. Drawing and dining-rooms adjoined, filling the south side of the house, and from each the same enchanting picture was seen.

Within a dozen yards of the verandah a handsome fountain discharged its liquid column fully twenty feet into the air, whence it crashed upon massive rocks and fell in miniature cascades into the large pond whose surface was covered with waterlilies, and in whose depths golden carp lazily enjoyed the good things provided for them. A wide lawn encircled the fountain, while beyond lay on three sides such a glorious array

of blooms as rarely falls to the lot of ordinary folk to gaze upon. Tier above tier the lovely flowers were banked so skilfully as to almost suggest the ordered arrangement of high stands at a show of the Royal Horticultural Society, and the sight elicited a chorus of delighted approval from the visitors.

"Oh, it's nothing," said the manager. "Just an ordinary country garden."

"Come, come, Melrose," said the Squatter, "don't depreciate your own handiwork in my hearing. It's very far from being ordinary. Few men, even with rich soil and an abundant water supply, would have either the taste or the skill to accomplish what you have done, and I say as emphatically as any member of the party, it is a truly remarkable achievement, and does you infinite credit."

"Now, Mrs. Grant," laughingly interposed Grace, "while my brother hides his blushes shall we go into the dining-room?"

When the meal was nearly over, Major Woodward, turning to the hostess, remarked, "Miss Melrose, your brother assured us that you were not in the least disturbed by the sudden invasion, in fact you rather enjoyed being 'hustled,' as they say in New York; but you mustn't think me rudely personal if I say that not one hostess in a thousand could have produced such a luncheon even upon six days' notice, instead of the brief six hours which you received. I've seen what can be done at an Indian prince's banquet, but your feat has beggared them all."

"Oh, Major, I've only done what anyone else could have managed just as easily; but I'm glad you have relished your meal."

"Major Woodward is quite right, Grace," said Mrs.

Grant. " You are not only a very clever manager, but your taste is simply perfect. Very few girls could have produced such a bewitching effect even with all the luscious fruits and lovely flowers at your disposal."

" You are very kind, Mrs. Grant," replied the gratified girl ; " but you know I was a good deal influenced by what Mr. Grant and my brother so often say, that English people have no conception of the wonderful resources of Australia, nor of the variety of delicious fruits which are the daily fare of even comparatively poor people in this country."

" Ah, now I understand," cried the Major. " Don't you see, Carew, this is all part of an elaborate plot to impress poor ignorant ' new chums ' with the grandeur of all things Australian ! Miss Melrose, we English folk are deeply indebted to you for your charming method of teaching a valuable lesson."

Then the merry party broke up, and while the three married ladies decided to lie down for a couple of hours, in view of the long ride home, the others sallied out to inspect the artesian well and the extensive fruit gardens, nurseries and plantations.

There was little probability that any of the English visitors would ever forget what was shown them on that summer afternoon. Here were long rows of vines loaded with bunches of ripening grapes and covering many acres of once barren land. There were three miles of orange, lemon, fig, peach, apricot and nectarine trees, all in magnificent condition and covered with fruit. Again, there were extensive orchards containing apple and pear trees of the choicest selection, reminding the visitors of their English homes, while in one special enclosure flourished bananas, a growth which Worcestershire and Devonshire never knew.

Ever eager to study novelties, Carew, attracted by the broad handsome leaves and luxuriant habit of these novel plants, stepped off the path into the grass which grew ankle deep about their stems. He was an ardent botanist, and was just engrossed in a critical examination of their structure when Mr. Melrose, whose back had been turned, suddenly exclaimed in vehement tones, "Mr. Carew, I saw a carpet snake in that grass on Saturday!"

The most accomplished acrobat could not have displayed greater agility than Carew shewed, as, with one backward bound, he leapt clear of the grass and landed on the path three yards away. Well was it for their guide that he was standing to watch the effect of his warning, and so was able to some extent to prepare for the crash, but the impact was tremendous, and visitor and manager went down together and rolled over and over in the wet soil, for the section to the left of the path had only that morning been heavily watered.

Before Carew had time to pick himself up and with profuse apologies assist Mr. Melrose to his feet, peals of merry laughter were heard from the four girls, and Grace's voice cried, "Oh, Mr. Carew, what *are* you doing to my poor brother?" while the Squatter exclaimed, "Why, my dear fellow, if you murder my manager we shall lose all our fruit crops, for there's not another man in the Colonies who can equal him in their culture."

"Mr. Melrose will, I hope, forgive me the unpremeditated assault," said Carew, "and you may rest assured, Mr. Grant, that your fruit crops are not endangered. I owe a general apology, and really feel very penitent; but I've no wish to make a closer,

acquaintance with one of your Australian snakes, after all I've heard about them ”

“ You're quite right to be careful,” replied the Squatter, “ at the same time you will probably find that anxiety to avoid the other is about equally shared by you and the snakes. If you molest the reptiles, and they find their retreat cut off, they will show fight, but as a rule they will glide out of harm's way.”

“ Well, I feel much ashamed of my undignified antics.”

“ No, no,” interposed Mr. Melrose ; “ there is nothing unbecoming in exercising a wise caution where venomous reptiles are in question. No man should needlessly expose himself to risks. I've myself known the truest heroism side by side with absolute terror of the domestic mouse.”

Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha ! ha !

Carew started, and looked round in all directions as the sound of mocking laughter reached him, and then turned enquiringly to Mr. Grant, who regarded his surprise with evident amusement.

“ Ah, Mr. Carew,” said he, “ do you think the place is haunted, or have you concluded that I'm a ventriloquist ? ”

“ I really don't know what to think,” answered the clergyman, “ the sounds are clear enough, but I'm quite unable to locate their source.”

Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha ! ha !

Again the uncanny merriment, and this time Carew cried, “ Pray explain, Mr. Grant ; no one here is laughing, and yet we are the only people in sight.”

As he finished the sentence a third peal of laughter rang out, clearer than before.

“ Quite true,” said the Squatter, “ we are the only

human beings in sight ; but if you will look up you will soon see the creature which emitted those puzzling peals of laughter."

" What ! have I encountered another of your Australian wonders, the laughing-jackass ? "

" The same. The bird which you see perched upon the topmost branch of that tree is the *Dacelo gigantea*, or laughing-jackass, and is one of our very best friends."

" Indeed, how is the friendship evinced ? "

" Well, I don't say that the bird is intentionally, but rather incidentally, friendly, for he is the mortal foe of snakes, and of course in destroying them he is doing us yeoman service. His first announcement just now appeared to me singularly opportune, for we were just discussing these reptile pests when his loud laugh seemed to say, ' Please remember that I have to be reckoned with.' "

" And," remarked Mr. Melrose, " I shouldn't be at all surprised to find that Master Jack has discovered the presence of that carpet snake you wished to avoid, Mr. Carew, and, if so, you may be sure its days are numbered. By staying here we are probably interfering with the bird's plans for capturing his dinner, so we had better get out of sight."

The whole party moved off some two hundred yards into a shrubbery whence they could watch the bird's movements without risk of alarming it. No sooner were they hidden than the laughing-jackass dropped from his lofty perch to a lower limb, and was observed to be intently watching the plot of thick grass around the bananas. For fully five minutes the close scrutiny continued, then with a swift plunge the bird alighted in the grass. Rapid blows with the powerful beak followed, then the victor flew upwards, bearing

with it a lifeless carpet snake whose yellow scales glistened in the sunlight.

As with one consent the hidden watchers shouted their applause, the bird instantly diverged from his course and sped swiftly away to a coppice half a mile distant.

"Really," laughed Carew, "my Colonial education is progressing famously. I've just made the acquaintance, simultaneously, of one of Australia's most famous birds and one of its infamous snakes; while on my journey here from Melbourne I was charmed to hear the note of the wonderful bell-bird."

"Ah, where was that?" enquired Helen Tennant.

"About thirty miles south of this place," replied Carew. "We were resting under some trees at noon on Saturday, and in the sweltering heat all nature seemed held in breathless silence, when I was startled by the sound of fairy-like chimes, which my fellow-traveller told me were the bell-bird's notes. The resemblance to silver bells was perfect."

"Then, Mr. Carew," said Enid, "you will appreciate the words of one of our Australian poets, William Sharp, who wrote:—

'The stillness of the Austral noon
Is broken by no single sound—
..... yet hush! I hear
A soft bell tolling, silvery clear!
Low soft aerial chimes, unknown
Save 'mid those silences alone.'

"That is another contribution towards my colonial education, Miss Enid," responded Carew, "and if you have many more such quotations from local poets, I shall want to borrow a volume of their complete works."

"Well, the library will supply even that," said the Squatter, "and now I think it's quite time to start

homewards if we are to reach Bannockburn for dinner."

Tea was served on the verandah, then eleven fresh horses were brought round, and with hearty words of thanks to the brother and sister for their entertainment, the guests rode away, vastly pleased with their excursion.

The succeeding days passed quickly. The Tennants left on the eighteenth of December, in order to spend Christmas with relatives in Adelaide.

Angus grew rapidly weaker, spite of Ralph's constant visits, Sister Millicent's assiduous attention, and the devoted ministrations of Enid, May, and the elder ladies.

Carew had been anxious for a swim in the lake, but submitting to Ralph's prohibition, had contented himself with the use of a bathroom, until on Monday, the twenty-third, the doctor had said to him, "Now, old fellow, to-morrow is Christmas Eve; we'll have a plunge together." But late at night came a telephone message from Mr. Webb, saying that Corporal Jenkins' son had hurt his foot, and would the doctor please drive out to see him the next morning. So it was arranged that the doctor should relinquish pleasure in favour of duty, and Carew must swim without his friend.

CHAPTER XV.

" We sit beneath the myrtle trees,
And talk, dear Motherland, of thee ;
And fancy views the glowing fires
Old Christmas brings with revelry.
They sing of peace, goodwill to men,
We sing the same dear song to-day ;
They kiss beneath the mistletoe,
We kiss beneath the orange spray."

—W. R. Wills.

A SURPRISE.

IT was barely light the following morning when a soft but insistent tapping roused the sleeper, and Ah Fang announced that it was four o'clock, and enquired whether Mr. Ralph would like tea or coffee before starting. Quickly donning dressing-gown and slippers, Ralph had just time for one plunge in the cold waters of the lake, and raced back to find the attentive Chinaman waiting with a cup of fragrant steaming coffee, a plate of hot buttered toast and some biscuits, also the news that Mick would be round with the buggy in five minutes. Despatching coffee and toast while dressing, Ralph pocketed the biscuits, and hastily putting together a few surgical necessaries, he hurried out to find a groom at the head of the restless leader, while Mick stood ready to hand the reins to the "young masther." But Ralph, passing behind the buggy, mounted on the near side, to Mick's immense surprise.

" Phwat, sorr, aren't ye goin' to dhrive, this beautiful mornin' ? " he cried.

" No thank you, Mick, the horses are fresh—I see you've harnessed a new pair—and I must keep a steady hand in case it should be necessary to operate upon

poor young Jenkins. But I daresay I may be glad enough to take the reins on the drive home."

" Well, oi'm glad if you'll even do that, sorr, for these two are raal beauties, and I want ye to thry their paces "; then, gathering the reins, he sprang nimbly to his seat, and the " beauties " proceeded to convince Ralph that Mick's encomiums were well deserved.

Gerald Carew slept soundly in his sumptuous quarters, and would probably have remained in dream-land until the regulation hour for awakening the guests, had not Ralph, before starting, impressed upon Ah Fang that " the Reverend," as the celestial had christened him, must certainly be roused at six o'clock, so that he might have ample time for a swim and a stroll before breakfast. So on the stroke of six the ever punctual and methodical Chinaman presented himself, with shaving water, and announced that he would return in ten minutes to pilot " the Reverend " through the shrubberies to the boathouse. When he came back, bearing several bath towels, Gerald was ready for him, and in a few minutes they were at the boat wharf, where one of the grooms had a roomy craft waiting. Ah Fang handed over his burden of towels to the groom, and departed to his indoor duties, after wishing " the Reverend " an enjoyable swim.

Gerald took the sculls, and, directed by the groom to the best part of the lake for the purpose, he put some of his old college vigour into the strokes, which rapidly conveyed them a good half-mile from shore.

" Here's your spot, sir," said Jem presently ; " you have splendid depth and you'll get the benefit of the morning sun now that we've passed that belt of pines. You see, sir, you're not to have the lake all to yourself, for the swans are coming this way to enjoy the sunlight

after their early breakfast ; still, they'll not interfere with you."

"All right, Jem, we'll allow the birds their share of the brightness. It won't be the first time by a good many that I've bathed in company with swans, only they were white ones and their plumage sparkled like snow in the sun's rays."

"Well, there ain't much of snow about these, sir," said Jem, "though for that matter I've never seen snow myself, nor white swans neither."

"Ah then, I see you are Australian born ; but you do get snow sometimes in this country, don't you ?"

"Not hereabouts, sir. I was born on this station just twenty-two years ago and there's been no snow in my lifetime. There's plenty of snow in the Blue Mountains, over in New South Wales, what they calls the 'Australian Alps,' but it's never been my luck to go that way. Now, sir, here's your spot for a header."

Without losing another moment Gerald took the groom's advice, and plunging into the clear waters, began to swim away from the boat. Then suddenly turning, he called "Jem, are you a swimmer ?"

"Uncommonly fond of it, sir," promptly responded the pleased groom.

"Then strip, man, and come in. I've not had a good race since leaving college, and shall be glad to test my pace after getting so rusty."

"Very good of you, sir ; but you see I was ordered to attend upon you."

"Quite right, Jem. You can obey your orders by attending upon me in the water just as well as in the boat—indeed, better—for I shall get more enjoyment out of my bathe, and I suppose that was what Mr. Grant had in his mind. Come, be sharp, man. Ah Fang

brought down enough towels for half-a-dozen bathers."

Jem, nothing loth, went overboard, and in a few strokes ranged alongside the visitor.

"Now," said Carew, "make for that mooring buoy, go round it on your right hand and back to the boat; that will be a fairly good spin. Are you ready? Go!"

Both swimmers went away at a great pace. Gerald had allowed the groom the inside position for passing the distant mark, and there appeared to be every prospect of his generosity costing him dear, for when they were but a few yards from the buoy his competitor was still on a dead level. A few seconds more and they were rounding it, Gerald on the outside, with the result that when they got back into the straight Jem was well ahead. But though there were no cheering crowds of college partizans, the old 'Varsity Blue would not be denied. Was he, whose fame as a prize-winner was still a tradition in his college, was he to be beaten in his first colonial encounter? So bracing himself for the struggle, he put on one of the old-time spurts, and almost expected to hear an approving roar from the towpath! However, all was silent, save for the notes of numerous water fowl and the splash of the swimmers as they ploughed their way to the goal. The goal! What had happened to it?

Raising himself in the water, Gerald saw an extraordinary sight. Several swans, attracted apparently by some object in the stern sheets of the boat, had been prompted by their natural curiosity to venture a closer inspection, and had followed this up by making a combined attack.

Now when repeated prods from the powerful beak of a swan are directed against the stern of a light boat, the craft must necessarily be set in motion. When

half-a-dozen beaks are at work, that motion rapidly increases ! Had Jem taken the precaution of dropping the anchor overboard, all would have been well. Had the boat's bow been directed towards the swimmers, the swans' strange freak could only have resulted in curtailing the race ; but unhappily she was heading directly away from them, and, urged forward by the resistless beaks, was unmistakably widening the distance.

Carew instantly grasped the situation. It was useless to continue swimming in the same direction, for the swans were propelling their boat—towels, clothes and all—straight down towards the lower end of the lake, two miles away. Their only chance was to make for the boat-house, about three-quarters of a mile from their present position, and turning to Jem he proposed this course.

" It's no use, sir," said the groom, " I'm spent. You get to shore, sir, as quickly as you can ; but I'm done. I oughtn't to have risked it, but have stopped in the boat as I was ordered. Good-bye, sir. Give my respects to the master, and say I'm sorry to have disobeyed his orders."

" Nonsense, Jem," cried Gerald cheerily, " I'm not going to say good-bye to you ; we'll stick together my good fellow. Besides, Jem, I'm responsible for your being in the water, so it's my duty to get you out of it, and, please God, I will. Now come along, can you swim as far as the buoy again ? "

Mercifully, Gerald was close to the groom as he asked the question, for it remained unanswered in words, and the next instant the muscular Cambridge athlete had swung the unconscious man round, and, turning on his back, was making rapid progress with his helpless

burden towards the comparative safety of the buoy, which a few minutes earlier they had so gaily rounded. It had been his intention to leave the groom at the buoy, which was of sufficient size to support several persons ; but even should he recover from his swoon, he would be in too exhausted a condition to hold on without assistance.

There seemed, therefore, nothing to be done but remain with him until their absence was discovered ; and as the big clock had just boomed forth the hour of seven, there was a strong probability of their having to wait there patiently until breakfast-time. This was not at all a pleasant prospect, for the water of the lake, continuously changed by the inflow of the fresh stream down the gully, was far from warm, spite of its being the height of summer. A rapid swim in such water was delightfully refreshing and invigorating, but even for himself Carew could not view the risk of an hour's immersion with equanimity, while for the poor groom he was filled with the gravest apprehension, as the effect would probably be fatal.

First lifting his heart to God in earnest supplication, the young clergyman glanced round in the hope of detecting some source of aid ; but save for the chattering of innumerable birds and the distant occasional bark of a dog, all was silent.

Then it occurred to him that since the sound of that bark was conveyed so distinctly across the water, the same medium would carry his voice to the shore. Had he been in England he would probably have called “ Help ! help ! ” with all the stentorian power of his lungs ; but being in Australia and having long ago tested, on far Dartmoor, the penetrative power of Ralph’s “ coo-eh,” he raised himself as high as possible

out of the water, while clasping the still unconscious Jem, and facing the boathouse, sent forth a pealing "coo-eh" of which a born colonial might have been proud.

Waiting thirty seconds he repeated the call twice in quick succession, and was almost immediately answered from the shore. Following up his success, he hailed again and again until he had the joy of seeing figures moving on the distant edge of the lake and rapidly nearing the boathouse. In a few moments a boat manned by three persons pushed off, pulled rapidly towards the buoy, and presently Gerald and his charge were hauled on board amid many exclamations of surprise and concern from the occupants of the boat, who proved to be three of the workmen employed on the new Vicarage, who had heard the "coo-eh" while taking an after-breakfast stroll near the lake.

"Sit you down, sir, in the bottom of the boat, and we'll throw our coats over you both," said one of the men, and very thankful was Carew to obey the injunction so far as regarded poor Jem; but he himself insisted on taking an oar as the very best means of restoring warmth to his chilled limbs.

They were soon at the boathouse, and Carew, arraying himself in the dressing-gown which happily he had discarded before entering the boat, an hour before, set to work with two of the men to chafe the poor groom, whom they had first laid upon a hastily improvised couch constructed with some boat cushions taken from the rack. The third man was despatched to the house with all speed for blankets and whatever restoratives might be available.

The messenger had scarcely emerged from the boathouse into the avenue which here skirted the lake for

some distance, than he became aware of the sound of wheels rapidly approaching, and, immediately saw to his delight that it was the doctor returning from his twenty mile drive.

As Ralph pulled up in response to the man's signal, the latter cried, "Oh, Dr. Grant, sir, do jump down and come into the boathouse!"

Instantly Ralph handed the reins to Mick and in another moment had passed within. With quick professional instinct he grasped the details of the scene before him and was stooping at the patient's side, with one hand testing the pulse while the other was placed upon the heart.

"Thank God for your timely coming," ejaculated Carew, and immediately added, "This is not a case of drowning, he has not been under water, but he fainted from exhaustion, and I fear the prolonged exposure has made matters worse."

"Ah, well, now I understand, so I will at once drive on to the house and prepare a draught which I hope and believe will revive the poor fellow. You four must continue to rub vigorously until I come back."

As Ralph neared the house he caught sight of his father, Enid and May, just passing up towards the breakfast-room from the rose garden, and called, "Don't wait breakfast for us; Carew and I will be with you as soon as I have prepared some medicine."

"What, for young Jenkins?" cried Mr. Grant. "I thought his was simply a surgical case."

"No, not for him. You shall hear all the news presently. I've had a morning of adventures." Then the buggy vanished round the house in the direction of the new infirmary.

While the doctor hastily entered the dispensary, and

summoning the ward-maid desired her to prepare a bed for Jem's reception, Mick, who had received minute instructions as they approached the house, left the horses in charge of a couple of grooms, sought out Ah Fang in his pantry, and bade him hasten with "the Reverend's" clothes in a valise to the buggy, while he himself obtained some blankets and hot-water bottles from one of the maids.

By the time these articles were all deposited, Ralph had returned from the dispensary with his draught, and was about to drive away when Ah Fang in tremulous tones inquired if anything were amiss with "the Reverend."

"No, no, he's all right; but, while I think of it, will you go to the cook and ask her to make some good strong mutton broth at once, and plenty of it, and send a basin full into the infirmary directly it's ready."

Driving rapidly back to the boathouse, the doctor entered quickly, and sent a man out for the valise and other articles. The patient was still unconscious, but evidently gaining ground, thanks to the continuous chafing. Bending over the couch, Ralph administered a few drops of the powerful restorative he had prepared. The effect was almost immediately apparent; so, ordering a cessation of the rubbing, he proceeded to envelop Jem in the blankets and placed the hot-water bottles to his feet, then giving another dose from the phial, he was gratified by an immediate response from the patient, who heaved a deep sigh and opened his eyes.

"There, there, that's better," exclaimed the doctor cheerily. "Now, Carew, you and I will take his shoulders, and a couple of you (addressing the workmen) can manage his feet. Good, now we'll carry you out to the buggy, Jem, and get you into bed as quickly

as possible. Some hot mutton broth and a long sleep will put new life into you, and on waking you will feel strong enough to go home. Remember this is Christmas Eve. It would never do for you to spend Christmas Day in the infirmary."

A few minutes sufficed to ensconce Jem in the snow-white bed the ward-maid had got ready for him, and after his first spoonful of fragrant broth he rewarded the doctor with a wan but very grateful smile as he cried heartily, "Bravo, Jem! You have the distinguished honour of being the very first patient in the new infirmary, and you're going to do us credit by making a quick recovery."

"Now, Carew, old man, come along. I expect you're about ready for some breakfast. I'm ravenously hungry."

"Well, my boy, what is the great news you have brought us?" enquired Mr. Grant, as soon as the two friends had fairly opened the attack upon fragrant coffee and equally appetising cutlets of freshly-caught Murray cod.

"There are several items of news, father, all interesting in their way, and to reverse their order, Jem Wilkins, who accompanied Carew in his bathe this morning, is at this moment in the ward-maid's hands, as the first patient in your new infirmary. A good long sleep will set him to rights, but it was a close shave for him, as his heart is in a weak condition. He must have been rather run down, and I should suggest a change of air. Couldn't he have a month's holiday?"

"Most certainly, my son. Curiously, Enid was telling me only yesterday that his mother is in feeble health, and that he, good fellow, has been sitting up a great deal with her at night."

"Oh, oh," cried the doctor, "that probably explains everything. Where is his mother to be found? I must go and see her."

"Then," said Enid, "we'll all ride over as soon as you have finished breakfast. Their cottage is about a mile beyond the offices. Don't you think, father dear, you could send both mother and son away to Glenelg for a time? She has been failing ever since poor Wilkins was killed, and a long spell at the sea, with her devoted son as companion, would probably do her a great deal of good, what do you say, Ralph?"

"Of course I shall be able to speak more positively after seeing her; but if, as I gather, she lost her husband as the result of an accident, she has probably received a very severe shock, and a complete change would certainly be advantageous."

"Then let it be so arranged," said the Squatter. "The poor husband, a very worthy fellow, died from blood-poisoning, following upon a severe laceration of the foot by some barbed wire. It happened six months ago, and we all felt at the time that had you been here, my boy, the poor man's life might have been spared."

"It is very likely, father, that amputation of the foot would have saved him, but it is of course useless to speculate, so let us do all we can for his widow and son."

"Now, to resume, the Jenkins' boy's trouble is a simple one, though probably a very trying one for his mother. There are no bones broken, but the ankle is rather badly sprained, and I expect he is too much of a pickle to take kindly to six weeks on his back. I don't envy poor Mrs. Jenkins!"

"No, indeed," said Major Woodward, "that boy is

a 'Turk,' and I've told the Corporal several times he'll have to consent to the lad going into the army. I fancy he is not unwilling, but the mother won't hear of it. But you haven't finished your story, Ralph."

"No, uncle, the most exciting of all is still to be told. When I reached Jenkins' house, naturally the first thought was for my juvenile patient, but it was quite evident that both the Corporal and his wife were excited over something which was being kept in reserve, and could scarcely contain themselves until I had finished with the boy. Then Jenkins, mysteriously raising his finger to enforce silence, softly opened the door of their best room and stood aside, while I gazed in amazement at a familiar figure sleeping soundly. Whom do you suppose ? "

"How many guesses will you allow us ? " asked Enid.

"One each, certainly no more, you greedy girl," laughed the doctor. "And to punish you your turn shall come last."

Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Woodward and May, Mr. Grant, Major Woodward and Carew, each in turn suggested a name which was promptly negative. Then, turning to Enid, Ralph observed severely, "I think it was a mistake to give you the last guess. I spoke of punishment, but I've really given you the best possible chance, after six failures. Now, Miss, you are permitted to speak."

"Then," replied the girl, "I say it was the gentleman you left in hospital, and who promised to visit us in the New Year—Mr. Beveridge."

"You witch ! " cried Ralph ; "whatever suggested him to your mind ? "

"Simply that I dreamed about him last night, and I have been wondering why I did."

"And is it really he, Ralph?" enquired his mother.
"How came he to be there?"

"Well, mother, you will be obliged to ask him yourself for a full explanation; for I left him as I found him—fast asleep. However, the Corporal told me that late last night he went out to get some cold water for his boy and was startled by hearing revolver shots. He hailed, and walking in the direction of the firing, came upon poor Mr. Beveridge, on foot and suffering from extreme exhaustion. I have arranged to drive over late this afternoon and fetch him in time for dinner. Meanwhile Mrs. Jenkins will keep the house quiet, so that he may sleep as long as possible."

"Well, what it all means we shall hear from Mr. Beveridge himself, I suppose," said Mrs. Grant, "but he will certainly be a welcome Christmas guest."

CHAPTER XVI.

"To all ages hath He spoken, lest the burdened back be broken,
So that sight and sound may take away the presence of
the years :

* * * * *

In bereavement and in sorrow tells the heart of a to-morrow
That we walk together comforted through trouble and
through pain ;
Gave His word to priest and poet, that the listening world
might know it,
And purge itself of folly and return to Him again."

—J. L. Michael.

RECOGNITION.

AS the buggy carrying Ralph and Mr. Beveridge was pulled up at the porch, Mr. and Mrs. Grant stood at the head of the steps to receive their son's patient and friend, whom they were prepared to welcome as an honoured guest to Bannockburn. Immediately behind them, but within the porch, Enid waited her turn to greet the English visitor. She was attired in her favourite white, with here and there a touch of pale blue. She carried a spray of maiden-hair and damask roses at her waist, but no jewellery, with the exception of the one dearly-prized ornament, her dead mother's watch and chain, still, as fifteen years ago, worn locketwise at her throat. Her glorious golden hair was tied back with a simple band of blue satin ribbon, and she looked indeed all that the Governor had pronounced her to be in his conversation with Mr. Beveridge in the Adelaide Hospital a fortnight previously. May Woodward, also in white, stood

chatting with Carew and her parents, a few yards in the rear, but hidden from the view of any one ascending the steps from the drive.

The visitor's face still showed traces of his severe illness, but it was lighted up by a smile of sincere gratification at the warmth and cordiality of the words uttered by his host and hostess, as they bade him welcome and expressed the hope that his visit might tend to thoroughly re-establish his health, and also their deep concern that his first acquaintance with Bannockburn should have been made under such deplorable circumstances as they understood had occurred the previous night.

"Ah, the incident was certainly somewhat trying," replied Mr. Beveridge, with a laugh, "but it had its compensations, for I received the most hospitable treatment at the hands of Jenkins and his excellent wife, and besides, I deserved to get into trouble for my temerity in venturing the journey without a proper guide, and in ignorance of the dangers which, in your wonderful country, beset rash and unwary horsemen."

"Well," exclaimed Mrs. Grant "you will make unfavourable comparisons between our treatment and the Jenkins's, if we keep you here upon the doorstep ; we shall all be interested to hear of your adventure later on." Then, drawing aside, she added, "Let me present you to our dear daughter Enid, and to our other guests."

Mr. Beveridge stepped forward, prepared to bow to the daughter of the house, and to grasp the hand which she had extended. But suddenly the smile vanished from his face, which became of a deathly pallor, and a cry which was almost a shriek escaped his lips. He stood just within the porch, transfixed and trembling,

and as Ralph rushed to his assistance, fearing sudden illness as a result of the mishaps and exposure of his journey, Mr. Beveridge clutched his arm, exclaiming, "Doctor, am I mad : who is she ? "

Soothingly and quietly Ralph replied, "Of course you are not mad, but you are very weary. This is my adopted sister, of whom I told you."

At the same moment, Enid, with outstretched hand, and standing where the full western sunlight threw every feature of her lovely face, every detail of attitude and dress, into strong relief, said, in clear sweet tones, "May I add my welcome, Mr. Beveridge ? We are all very glad to have you at Bannockburn."

But the words—or was it the voice?—only served to increase the agitation. Labouring under profound mental excitement and clinging convulsively to Ralph's arm, he gazed fixedly at Enid in a manner which even to this girl of placid temperament was infinitely disturbing. The situation was indeed growing very painful for everyone, and the chief actor remained speechless, apparently quite incapable of giving any explanation of his strange behaviour.

But as Enid stood nervously fingering the ornament at her throat, the tension was suddenly broken by Mr. Beveridge asking in almost stern tones, as though making a powerful effort to restrain his overwrought feelings, "Young lady, pardon me, but where did you get that watch and chain ? "

"They belonged to my mother," she replied, simply.

"Permit me to ask—is there a portrait in the watch ? "

"No, not to my knowledge," said the now bewildered girl.

"Would you allow me, a stranger, to handle it for

a moment? Forgive the seeming presumption, I beg, for I am very deeply concerned."

Removing the watch, she placed it in his hand. With accustomed fingers he deftly opened the thick outer case, then touching a hitherto undetected secret spring, displayed to her astonished gaze an exquisitely painted miniature of—himself!

Yes; making allowance for the difference of twenty years, and for the now white hair which had once been jet black, it was clear to Enid, as he still held the watch open for her inspection, that the face there portrayed, the face which all unconsciously she had daily carried with her so many years, was indeed the face of the man who now with eyes of yearning tenderness looked into her own.

Then, amid the tense silence, Mr. Beveridge, calmer, but still in words broken by overpowering emotion, said, "My child, if that watch and chain belonged to your mother, it is beyond a shadow of doubt that you are looking upon your father, for the watch, with its concealed portrait, was my wedding gift to my wife just twenty years ago, the chain being subsequently made for her in India, during our brief weeks of wedded happiness; and it was your astounding resemblance to her, when she was just your present age, that so startled me a few moments ago.

"My child, my child; I am already familiar with your life story, from the lips of an old friend whom I met in Adelaide. How my beloved wife came to be in Australia is a mystery which may never be solved, but the fact is indisputable, and I thank God that, after years of sorrow, He has permitted me this great joy. Come to me, my darling, come to your father!"

In an instant Enid was clasped in his warm embrace,

and, while her eyes brimmed with happy tears, was returning the kisses he lavished upon her, oblivious altogether of the presence of others.

Then, suddenly recalling the fact that they were not alone, the father turned with apologies to Mr. and Mrs. Grant, but was promptly silenced by the Squatter's hearty words, "My dear sir, we are all rejoicing in your joy, and we, too, thank God for the blessing He has brought to you and to her who for fifteen years has been to us as our own child, the light of our eyes."

"Ah, indeed," exclaimed Mr. Beveridge; "how can I ever express my thanks to you both for all that you have done for my darling?"

While this dramatic scene was being enacted, the group in the rear had moved still further from the entrance, not even the incident of the portrait having power to draw them from their apparently studied aloofness. But now the hostess turned towards them, with a view to effecting the necessary introductions, yet before she could utter a single word the newly-arrived guest, with a look of amazement, cried, "What! more surprises? My dear Mrs. Woodward, how in the world did you get here? And you, too, Major, and my dear old friend May? This *is* a pleasant meeting."

"But," said Mrs. Grant, looking exceedingly puzzled, "how can you possibly be old acquaintances? You never told me, Barbara, that you knew Mr. Beveridge."

"How could I, Lilian," replied Mrs. Woodward, "when we did *not* know Mr. Beveridge?"

"Oh come, come!" cried the Squatter. "If this sort of thing continues, Ralph will be having half-a-dozen patients in his new infirmary, all suffering from brain fever."

"Well," interposed the Major, "I am sorry to rob

the doctor of an opportunity of treating his relatives as mere 'cases,' and thereby giving further proof of his own undoubted ability; but if I may be allowed to ask just one question perhaps everything will be made clear.

"For fifteen years, ever since that memorable journey, Enid has been looked upon as your adopted daughter. Now that her father has come and established his claim, I wish to enquire whether, as she clearly cannot be any longer termed Miss Grant, he wishes her to be known henceforth as Miss *Beveridge*?"

"Ah, Woodward, now you have fairly cornered me," said Enid's father; "but you will readily understand that when, to gratify a whimsical desire for privacy, I travelled under my grandmother's maiden name, I was far from anticipating such an astounding *dénouement* as this."

"Well, then," pursued the Major, "I will take upon myself to vary somewhat the terms of Ralph's introduction, a few minutes ago, of the gentleman whose acquaintance he and Carew made on shipboard.

"You, Aleck and Lilian, under these most extraordinary circumstances, will forgive my addressing myself to Enid, as it is to her primarily that this explanation is of importance and interest.

"Enid, my dear, when, years ago, I was privileged to assist in your recovery"—

"What, what!" exclaimed her father; "*you* were at the party, Woodward?"

"My dear fellow," said the Major, "just make up your mind that there is plenty more to tell you, all in good time, but do let me get on with my little speech."

"I was going to say, Enid," resumed the Major, "that when I joined in the search for the 'white girl'

piccaninny' I little dreamed that her father was a quondam brother officer of my own, a personal friend, and—when at rare intervals he was at home—a near neighbour. And now I am reminded too that had we been able, on the evening succeeding your rescue, to open that watch and discover the miniature hidden within it, both I and Corporal Jenkins would have instantly recognised the portrait. I had at that time been four years retired, but your father has remained in the service to be one of its greatest ornaments. Honoured by his sovereign, his name and exploits are as familiar here in Australia as in the heart of the Empire. Enid, I ask you to present your dear father anew to his host and hostess, under his own proper name—Sir John Beveridge Barton Kynnersley, Bart., V.C., G.C.S.I., known to every one as a true hero and a wise and able administrator."

As the Major concluded, the peal of the dressing gong relieved the strain of the situation, and Mr. Grant, turning to Enid, said, " My bairn, I was intending to pilot *Mr. Beveridge* to his room. It will be better that Sir John Kynnersley should be conducted by his daughter; but in your desire to talk, don't forget that you have only half-an-hour before dinner."

Dinner at the Grants' hospitable table was ever a pleasing function, but never since their marriage had the Squatter and his wife seen happier faces around their board on Christmas Eve, nor taken part in more cheery conversation than on that eventful evening.

With dessert, came a general demand for Sir John's story. Ralph was much interested and amused by learning how his patient had seized upon pen, ink and paper the moment he had left the hospital; and Sir John having explained his friendship for forty years

with the Governor, since the days they had spent together at Harrow, briefly told how, seized with a strong though quite unaccountable desire to spend Christmas at Bannockburn, he had travelled from Adelaïde by easy stages until he found himself within forty miles of Mr. Grant's station. How that, starting early on the previous day, upon a good horse, and with Hector as his companion, he had ridden fully half the distance before taking a long rest under the welcome shade of a group of stringy-bark eucalyptus, and partaking of the luncheon which had been most lavishly provided. Believing that he would be at his destination by five or six o'clock, he was on the point of leaving the remainder of the food for the cockatoos, when happily it occurred to him that perhaps wisdom would suggest providing for possible accidents. The trees under which he lay stood upon the side of a high hill from which he obtained extensive and lovely views of rich well-watered country, much of it closely resembling English parklands, and after taking his fill of the beautiful landscape he fell asleep and—overslept himself. "Then," continued the narrator, "I rose hastily, found that it was already nearly five o'clock, and with a twenty-mile ride before me through an unknown country, gave my mind to the one thought of making up for the time I had lost in sleep."

"Pardon my interjecting just one observation, Sir John," said Ralph; "I, as your doctor, am profoundly glad you did have that long sleep. It probably saved you from a severe relapse. You were not sufficiently recovered to undertake such a ride all alone."

"Well, doctor, I bow to your dictum. I fear it was rather rash. However, you will admit that I have received a wonderful tonic this evening. But to

resume my tale. I forgot in my haste all the warnings so kindly given to me before starting, and urged my horse to a sharp canter. I don't think we had covered more than a mile when the poor beast crashed to the ground. Happily, I was not unaccustomed to losing a horse from under me, and managed to disengage myself and jump clear. It was a hopeless case—the off fore leg broken in a wombat hole—and drawing my revolver from the holster I shot the poor creature. So there was I, stranded about nineteen miles from my destination, and with only my faithful Hector to bear me company. For about four miles I plodded on, the country becoming more wooded, and I could see in the distance dense forest land covering a range of hills. Musing upon my loss, I stepped out grimly, the dog a pace or two in front, when—as though the death of my poor horse were not a sufficiently evil stroke—I learned that there was a still worse blow in store for me. I was startled from my reverie by the unmistakable hiss of a snake, a sound with which twenty-five years in India had made me familiar. It came from a yard or two on my right, in fact I must have roused the reptile by treading upon a broken branch under the other end of which it lay coiled. The angry creature was about to launch itself upon me, but rapid as was its movement, my faithful dog was quicker, for, spinning round the moment he heard the hiss, with one snap of his massive jaws he actually seized it while in the act of springing. But, alas! the poor dog's grip was too far from the snake's head to prevent the play of those venomous fangs, and I was dismayed to see their lightning dart as the creature struck again and again at the dog's face. Lifting the branch which had caused all the trouble, I brought it down heavily on the snake's tail,

and instantly it became limp and lifeless. Hector, in the meantime, not relaxing his grip of the dead reptile, was manifestly yielding to the rapidly working poison, and rather than witness any prolongation of the poor dog's sufferings, I again made use of my revolver to end the distressing scene.

" Consulting my pocket compass, I trudged on, as I hoped, in the direction of Bannockburn, feeling all the while, as you may suppose, very low-spirited. Presently the scattered trees gave place to a denser growth, and my difficulties were increased from the fact that darkness had now fallen. Luckily my box of wax vestas was a large and full one, so that by a liberal use of them and by constant reference to the compass, I managed to make fair progress. But even the matches gave out at last, and I had to content myself with walking very slowly and feeling carefully in advance with my hunting-crop to avoid collisions. Fully an hour had passed since I left poor Hector, and sitting with my back to a tree, I was very thankful to consume the remainder of my sandwiches. Then came another spell of walking, but I was beginning to flag from sheer weariness, when an incident occurred which banished every feeling of exhaustion and filled me with renewed hope and energy. So far, I had been treading on a uniform surface which told of nothing save the evergreen gum trees, when suddenly my right foot, advanced in the act of making another of my cautious steps, plunged into a thick carpet of very thin dried leaves. The left foot followed ; then with both feet I stood there kicking the mass of leaves in all directions, as though bereft of my wits. As the truth flashed upon me, I stooped, clutched a handful of the fragrant leaves, buried my face in them, and then shouted aloud, ' Oak ! Oak !

Thank God ! ' It was indeed a thrilling moment, for I realised at once, there in the darkness, what the presence of those oak leaves meant. I had been told how you, Mr. Grant, had loved to surround yourself with the trees of the homeland, and I concluded that now I was no longer lost, but within measurable distance of friends, and shelter and rest.

" I paused to place one of the oak leaves in my pocket-book as a souvenir, and, drawing my revolver, fired the four remaining shots ; then, reloading all six chambers, I emptied them at intervals of thirty seconds. Still there was no response. So, loading once more, I recommenced the fusilade, and after a second discharge I was delighted to hear a hail in the distance. Walking in the direction of the voice, I continued firing my revolver, and presently was greeted by a man carrying a lantern, who proved to be Jenkins. His house was indeed a haven of rest ; and the doctor will have told you how he found me there this morning, sleeping off my exhaustion under the Jenkins' hospitable roof."

" Yes," said Enid, " Ralph told us that. But he also said how sorry he was that you had been so venturesome, for he was sure you were not sufficiently recovered from your terrible illness. So father, dear, you must let me play a daughter's part and beg you to go to bed now, sorry as I am to lose sight of you."

" Well, my sweet daughter, I hope to prove a model father in my obedience to your wishes ; but I must plead to sit up a little longer, for I should so like some music, with Mrs. Grant's permission. Besides, you must remember that I slept until noon to-day."

On reaching the drawing-room the General asked if he might again hear some of the sweet and soothing

Beethoven and Mendelssohn strains to which he had listened the night the *Wombat* lay at anchor in the Downs. So, Enid at the piano, and Mr. Grant, Ralph and Carew with violin and flute, entranced their hearers for an hour, after which May took Enid's place and accompanied Mrs. Grant's harp through several charming Welsh and Scottish airs.

Meanwhile, rumour had been busy among the servants—indoor and out—and when at ten o'clock the household mustered in the hall for prayers, it was observed that Miss Enid sat by the gentleman who had been driven home by the doctor, and that her hand was affectionately clasped in his; also that Mr. Ralph occupied Miss Enid's usual seat at the organ, where he played, as a voluntary, the glorious anthem, “O taste and see how gracious the Lord is.”

The Squatter briefly announced the identity of their distinguished visitor, who, travelling to the Antipodes for his health, had been so remarkably guided by divine providence to the very house which for years had sheltered the daughter of whose existence he had previously been unaware: and concluded by inviting all to join in thanksgiving for this signal mercy. How heartily they did so was shown in the singing of the hymn given out by Carew, “Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven,” and in the fervent “Amen” at the close of the brief service.

When shortly afterward Mr. Grant showed Sir John to his room, he said, “There are various matters which you and I should discuss together, but you mustn't overtax your strength. Indeed, I fear the excitement of this evening, following upon your adventure of last night, may have been too much for you in your invalid condition.”

"No, no, my dear Grant, you may set your mind at rest on that score. I feel a new man. The discovery of my child has given me back twenty years of my life. However, you are quite right as to the wisdom of getting to bed. To-morrow we will, as you say, discuss many things."

Ten minutes later, a tap at the door winning permission, Ralph entered, saying, "Sir John, you must please bear in mind that you are my patient."

"Oh, nonsense, my dear doctor; I do bear in mind, very gratefully, that I *was* your patient, but surely I have given my doctor his *congé* now?"

"On the contrary; it is essential that I should watch you very closely, and after all your experiences of the past thirty hours I think that you should take this opiate to ensure sound sleep."

"No, no, you good fellow. I must repeat the reminder I gave Enid in the drawing-room, that I slept soundly until noon to-day. Besides, there was some mention of Waits, and after the magnificent singing I heard at prayers this evening it would be a real pleasure to listen to more. It is now ten o'clock, and as I'm feeling sleepy, there is no doubt I shall drop off directly into undisturbed slumber, then wake up to hear the carols, and after that sleep on until morning."

"Very well," assented the doctor, "'a wilfu' man maun hae his way'; so I'll say good-night."

"Ah no, wait just a moment, there is something I must say to you. To-morrow is my darling child's birthday, and I would wish it to be in every respect the happiest she has yet known. A new relationship has come into her life to-day, but, my dear Ralph, I cannot forget that she has known other relationships which, until to day, have been all-sufficing, and I will

not be so selfish as to claim her exclusively, much as I should wish to have her near me. Now tell me frankly, am I not right in believing that you love my child, and that, but for my coming, you would have asked her to marry you ? ”

“ You are quite right, Sir John. I do love her, very dearly, and I had intended to tell her so on her birthday.”

“ I thought as much, Ralph, and now I, her father, beg that you will carry out your intention. The only condition I make is that you and your wife shall return with me to England on a long visit. Now good-night, for I want to snatch some sleep before the carols are sung.”

“ Good-night, Sir John. From my heart I thank you for what you have just said to me.”

CHAPTER XVII.

“Behold her there,
As I beheld her ere she knew my heart,
My first, last love; the idol of my youth,
The darling of my manhood, and, alas!
Now the most blessed memory of mine age.”

—Tennyson.

CHRISTMAS.

THE visitor slept soundly for nearly two hours. On awaking, he immediately noticed that through the open windows of his room there came from the gardens below the exquisite perfumes of an Australian Christmas night, and his newly-found happiness compelled the exclamation, in the psalmist's words, “At midnight will I rise to give thanks unto Thee.”

As he stood gazing upon the lovely scene, bathed in summer moonlight, the first stroke upon the great bell in the clock tower proclaimed that Christmas Eve was merging into Christmas Day, and scarcely had the last chime ceased when a burst of song effectually banished all desire for further slumber, for the thrilling carol “Christians, awake! Salute the happy morn” was being rendered in perfectly balanced harmony by forty well-trained voices.

A brief pause followed, and then Sir John started, and for an instant forgot his surroundings, as a rich contralto voice, exactly resembling those loved tones so familiar twenty years ago, sang the opening verse of “O come, all ye faithful”; then other singers took up the strain, until with a rush of triumphant melody the whole choir joined in the chorus “O come let us adore Him!”

Those words of glorious invitation fell on many ears in and around the house and, wafted across the lawns, were heard in the chamber where Sister Millicent kept vigil beside the dying Angus.

Turning towards the open window, the old man listened eagerly ; then, placing his hand upon the nurse's arm, he said in strong, firm tones, "Lassie, dinna ye hear the blessed sang ? It's the best, the greatest o' them a'. To adore *Him*, Himself, ma ain dear Lord, has aye been ma joy an' ma desire. An' verra sune I'll be where I'll adore Him wi' nae clouds to come between."

* * * * *

Christmas morning broke in cloudless splendour. It had been understood that Sir John Kynnersley should not be roused until half-an-hour before breakfast time, but when all the other members of the house party came downstairs in order to start together for church, they found him quietly reading on the verandah.

"I wanted to kneel by your side, my child," he said to Enid, "and take with you the memorials of His death, on this Christmas morning—and your birthday."

"Thank you, father dear ; it is delightful to have you with me, but isn't it too great a risk ?"

"I don't think so, dear child. I have slept very well and feel wonderfully fit and strong. And now, let me wish you many happy returns of the day. I will reserve my birthday gift. I understand it is the Bannockburn custom to put all the presents on or near the plate of the recipient."

As they approached the house half an hour later, Sir John led his daughter to a seat beside a tree bearing simultaneously ripe luscious oranges, green immature fruit, and sweet-scented blossoms. "My child," said

he, "the burden of the past sad years has been lifted, and I can no longer shut myself up with my trouble, for 'the sorrow has been turned into joy.' You have never, nor indeed had your dear mother, seen your English home, but I may tell you that there hangs in the library a large and life-like portrait in oils of her whom we have both lost."

"Yes, father dear, May has spoken of it, and of her desire when a child to be allowed to see behind the locked door which hides it."

"Ah yes, dear little May often asked me to unlock that door ; but I never could bear that other eyes than my own should see the loved face. Yet, my child there was one fact of which May was quite unaware. Years ago I had the picture photographed, and that photograph, in its Morocco case, has accompanied me in all my travels. To-day it leaves my hands for the first time. I place it in yours, on your birthday, to be one of your most valued possessions. See, with this key I will open the case for you. That is a speaking likeness of your mother. You will not wonder at my being struck by the resemblance you bear to her."

Enid burst into tears as the portrait was opened, and placed in her hands. "Oh, father," she exclaimed, "it might have been my twin sister, the likeness is so exact, even the dress is like mine ;" and then with a hungry cry of "Mother ! Mother !" the girl passionately kissed the portrait.

"There, dear child," said Sir John, soothingly, "now take the key and place it upon your chain—your mother's chain. My other birthday gift you will find upon your plate at breakfast, but I felt sure you would rather receive this one when we were alone together. Now let us join the others."

As they entered the breakfast-room the rest of the party vigorously clapped, and cried in unison, "Many happy returns of the day!" By every plate were Christmas gifts, but to Enid fell the lion's share, and a side table was filled with the numerous birthday offerings of relatives and friends. An envelope beside her plate contained a brief note from her father begging her to use as she deemed best the enclosed cheque for fifty pounds.

Turning at once to express her thanks, she asked "You really mean, father dear, that I may expend it as I will?"

"I mean," Sir John replied, "literally what is written in my note."

"Then I will send it on at once to the Bishop, to be devoted exclusively to the work he is so anxious to push forward among the blacks. He told me a great deal when he was here about what has been done already; but also spoke of his keen disappointment at the lack of interest people shew in his scheme. Several actually declined to help because they didn't believe that black fellows have souls."

"Your decision is excellent," said her father; "only, now you have explained what you are doing, you must let me give you another fifty as a gift from myself to the same fund."

"And," added the Squatter, "by way of making your happiest birthday a little happier, my bairn, I will hand you a cheque for a hundred and fifty on behalf of the Grant family, father, mother, and son."

"Pardon me, father," interposed Ralph, "if I ask you to confine your gift to mother and yourself: mine is already given, as Enid will find when she reaches my envelope."

Turning the pile of letters at her side, the girl opened the one indicated, and read, "Accept, dear Enid, the enclosed fifty pounds, with Ralph's loving birthday greetings. You were saying the other day how greatly you wished to help forward the Bishop's mission to the blacks : perhaps you may like to apply this money to so desirable an object."

"Oh thank you Ralph ! That makes five fifties."

"No, no," cried the Squatter ; "I said one hundred and fifty, and I'm not going to withdraw from my promise because my son likes to make his own gift, you can call mine two seventy-fives if you like. But anyhow, the total so far is three hundred pounds."

"How good you are, daddy ! Won't the Bishop be delighted ! "

"And if you please, I don't want to be left out in the cold," said Major Woodward, "so I'll give you a cheque for a hundred and fifty on behalf of the Woodward trio."

When the meal was over, Enid spoke to Sir John for some time of Angus, telling of all the old man had been to her adopted parents, and of the affectionate regard he had ever shewn toward herself. As she ceased, he said, "Take me to him, dear. I should greatly like to add him to my list of new friends."

So on this bright Christmas morning, the gladdest, brightest birthday she had ever known, Enid led her father across the lawns and through the rose garden, to visit the old man who had never before failed to be among the first to offer birthday greetings, not infrequently in the form of a brief poem attached to the daily bouquet.

Sister Millicent moved away as they entered, though not before she had received a warm handshake from

her late patient, whom she addressed for the first time as "Sir John."

"Ah yes, Sister," he replied laughingly, "I owe you an apology for remaining in your care under false pretences." Then, turning to Angus, who had just placed an envelope in Enid's hand and received a warm kiss in return, the General said cheerily, "A happy Christmas to the invalid!"

"Ah, General," responded the old man feebly, "wi' me—

'The sands o' time are sinkin',
The dawn o' heaven breaks.'"

"And is it a fair dawn to you, my friend?" asked Sir John.

Pressing the hand of his questioner, the aged Christian said, with a bright smile, "Lang syne the Guid Shepherd found me wanderin' on the dark mountains o' sin. He picked me up, an' placed me on His shoulders o' strength. For mair than forty years he has aye carried me. He has never yance wanted to lay me doon, an' has never fine faut o' the weight. An' noo to ye, General, an' to ye ma bonnie bairnie, wha God has blessed sae richly, I'll say good-bye . . . for I'm gangin' to see *Him* to see . . . the King . . in His beauty!"

The smile deepened, the head sank, as the General, much moved, whispered, "My child, we have seen a pilgrim cross the river and enter the Celestial City."

The nurse, when summoned from the adjoining room, appeared with tearful eyes and holding an open paper in her hand. "Ah," she exclaimed, glancing at the bed, "I'm not surprised. He had no sleep at all last night, and when I tried to persuade him to rest, he said, 'Na, na, lassie, I'm gangin' hame, to rest wi'

ma Lord. Jest sit doon where the light will fa' on yer face, an' sing me ane o' the sangs o' Zion.' Then towards morning he asked for pencil and paper, and see what the dear old man gave me just before you came in."

Sir John took the paper, and read aloud this acrostic, the last poetic effort of the saint who had now entered into his rest :—

Maiden o' sympathetic heart an saft bewitchin' smile,
 Inspirin' hope wi' twa' bright een, sae pure an' void of guile.
 Life's roughest paths are kenned by ye, o' sufferin' death
 an' grief.
 Love's tendrest ministries, through ye, bring comfort an'
 relief.
 In harrowin' scenes o' rackin' pain, an' nights in vigil spent,
 Christ's messenger ye are indeed to hearts wi' anguish rent.
 Equipped by Him, the Lord ye love, movin' at His command,
 New grace for ilka day be yours fra His ain piercéd hand,
 Till the guerdon o' faithful service be gi'en in the glory land !

" Very touching, Sister," said the General. " You will prize those lines, I'm sure."

" Indeed I shall," she replied ; " it was a great privilege to minister to such a real, genuine Christian. But didn't he give *you* a note, Miss Kynnersley ? I feel sure he wrote one."

Enid started, on being for the first time addressed by her own proper surname. Then she exclaimed, " Yes, he did, and I was keeping it to read in my own room, but I think, father dear, it will be better if you will read it aloud, as you did the other one, here in the room where he lies."

Sir John opened the envelope and read the following words, feebly written in pencil :—" I hae heard o' the Lord's guid grace to ye this nicht, ma bairnie. What a birthday gift his love hae gi'en ye ! An' noo ye hae gotten anither name, but auld Angus will no be here to ca' ye by it, yet I'll just mak bold to tell ye in ma

ain auld way the name I have lang had for ye in ma
ain mind an' heart—

When I think o' the bairnie's unselfish behaviour,
Adornin' the doctrine o' God her Saviour,
I can find nae title sae suitable,
Nae appropriate phrase the fu' truth to tell,
As that whilk is writ in the Holy Word,
'Behold the handmaid of the Lord'!"

The reader ceased; then, clasping his daughter's hand, led her gently from the room, after she had imprinted one last kiss upon the face from which, for fifteen years, loving eyes had so often looked into her own.

The bell was sounding for morning service as they entered the house, and the whole party walked up together to the new church, where a large congregation assembled for the joyous Christmas festival.

The vicar conducted the service, and his marked emphasis of the words, "We also bless Thy holy Name for all Thy servants departed this life in Thy faith and fear" found an echo in all hearts, for every one there had known and esteemed the aged head-gardener. Upon Carew's sermon we need not dwell, beyond recording a characteristic remark made by the coach man as he left the church:—

"Indade, Kitty, me gurll, his rivrence was talkin' straight at me all the toime when he bid us follow the footsteps av Him who was born into the worlld this blissid Christmas Day. It's little oi've done av that same, oi'm thinkin'."

To which his wife sagely replied, "Me dear bhoy, his rivrence spoke to me just as much as 'to' yersilf. But oi belave ivery wan else thought the loike. Anny-way, we may be sure his rivrence hoped they would."

After luncheon Mr. Grant invited Sir John to fulfil

the engagement made on the previous evening, and the two spent nearly an hour together in the library. Into the first part of their conversation we will refrain from prying ; but with that portion which has a marked bearing on this story we may properly deal.

" Nothing," remarked the Squatter, " can bring back the dead ; but it is possible that more light may be thrown upon those extraordinary events of nineteen or twenty years ago, of which you and we respectively hold the warp and the woof. The only connection, so far, lies in the amazing fact that my brother-in-law should have actually taken part in the occurrences on this Continent, and have subsequently learned from yourself, his friend and neighbour, on returning to England, the sad story of your loss. Yet he had not the most distant notion that he himself held, if not the actual key to the mystery, at any rate knowledge complementary to your own, forming, indeed, two ends of the chain, of which the connecting link, namely the reason for your wife's presence in Australia, is still undiscovered.

" Of course we know that there are many mysteries of the sea, the solution of which will never be known in this world. But it appears to me that in this case further enquiry would be by no means quixotic. Personally, I am prepared to spend both time and money to this end, and Woodward is quite of my opinion that discoveries might be made. Some years ago, at Enid's earnest request, I obtained through the natives amongst whom she was born, clear and precise information as to the exact spot where her mother's body had been interred, and I caused a marble column to be conveyed thither from Melbourne, partly by rail and subsequently by bullock team. That pillar to-day.

covers your wife's grave ; but of course the inscription merely records a daughter's grief at the untimely loss of her mother, under tragic circumstances, and no mention of the mother's name. It had been my intention that the memorial should be erected to the memory of both her parents, as it appeared to me likely that the man who carried her to safety was the poor lady's husband. Enid, however, never adopted this view, and in deference to her wishes I yielded the point.

" I learned years ago from Woodward's letters the main incidents connected with your distressing bereavement. It appeared that the *Cygnets* was a remarkably fine, swift Indiaman, and that you were personally acquainted with her commander, and had selected the ship for that reason.

" It is obvious that a vessel sailing from Calcutta for London, with Cape Town as her first port of call, could by no imaginable variation of the compass find herself off the coast of South Australia, or Victoria ; and from the information gleaned from the natives they must have been living within two or three days' journey of the coast when Mrs. Barton was so remarkably placed in their care.

" Now, briefly, if you would like to make closer scrutiny into these matters, I will arrange another expedition. Only, this time we should of course journey into Victoria, to the lake by whose brink the remains of your wife lie interred, and if necessary we could prolong our search to the coast."

" My dear Grant," said Sir John, " I most thankfully accept your offer. In any case I should wish to visit my loved one's grave, and, as you suggest, it is quite possible that we might make some important discovery."

"Very well," said the Squatter, "it shall be so arranged, and we'll start as soon as the *Caledonia* can be equipped. Now let us join the others in the garden."

Tea was served under an enormous weeping-willow which partially overhung one of the fountains, and the five English visitors once more had occasion to note, upon a large specially arranged table, the lavish supply of those "kindly fruits of the earth" unfamiliar to the inhabitants of Northern climes, but which residence at the antipodes secures in such abundance.

"It is a rule at Bannockburn, father dear," said Enid, "that Christmas Day shall be a holiday for everybody. If of necessity some indoor or outdoor servants must work, they are granted a holiday afterwards to compensate. I tell you this to explain why we never ride, drive, or use the steamer on Christmas Day."

"And a very admirable rule, my child. I wish it obtained more widely. However, I suppose there is no bar to our walking, and I should like a stroll in these lovely grounds if my wise doctor will permit me to walk so far."

"By all means, Sir John; with Enid as your guide and companion, I'm sure you won't be allowed to overtax your strength."

"Well, doctor, come with us, then I shall be doubly guarded. You certainly won't be *de trop*."

The whole party broke up into groups and dispersed in search of recreation until it should be time to dress for dinner. The Woodwards and Carew chose boating on the lake, while the General, his daughter and Ralph walked round the gardens and tennis courts, then across to the lake. There Mr. and Mrs. Grant joined them, and they proceeded by winding paths through

the woods to the summit of the hill upon which Mr. Grant and Angus had reined in their horses many years before, and from which had been obtained such glorious and diversified views.

"I don't wonder at your selection, Grant," said Sir John ; "this is indeed one of the most superb views I ever beheld. Indeed, it is scarcely conceivable that any one could go farther afield with such a site before him."

"Aye, General. It's now more than thirty years since first I stood here, and to-day I love as much as then to gaze upon this fair scene of woodland, lake and river."

"Yes," added Mrs. Grant, "and every guest who climbs this hill is equally charmed. Indeed, with the growth of the many plantations, the natural beauties have been enhanced. The inevitable sameness of the foliage twenty-eight years ago, when Aleck first brought me here, has been replaced by a great and systematically studied diversity, for which we have to thank that dear old man Angus. But, Sir John, do sit down on this bench ; we three are entitled to a rest after our climb."

"Then, mother, I hope you'll rest for fully ten minutes," said Ralph, "for I want to see that group of Wellingtonias. I measured their girth before I went to England, and am anxious to see how many inches they have grown. Come along, Enid, we'll call for our elders on the way back."

The ten minutes became twenty, then lengthened into thirty, but still the trio on the bench sat undisturbed. Nor did they object to the prolonged rest amid such lovely surroundings, for the weather was—well, it was Australian Christmas weather ; 'twere needless to say more to those who have experienced it, while such of my readers as have not, I

advise to seek an early opportunity of doing so.

At last, just as his father had remarked "It takes Ralph an unconscionably long time to measure the girth of three Wellingtonias," the young people were seen returning.

"Multiply your ten minutes by four," laughed the General, "and you have the time you've been away. One expects a doctor to be a man of his word."

"Well, Sir John, Enid evidently feels that the word of this particular doctor can be relied upon, for she has accepted the assurance of my love for her, and will marry me, subject to your permission, and this, I have told her, is already pledged to us."

"Yes, dear lad, as I told you last night, I give her to you with the utmost confidence that I am thereby securing her perfect happiness. May you both know for many, many years, the joy which I experienced with her mother for a few brief weeks. Enid, my child, I conclude you have shewn Ralph my birthday gift to you. If so, I should like his parents to see it also, while we are all here together."

The portrait was produced, and Mr. and Mrs. Grant were as much impressed by its striking resemblance to Enid, as she herself and Ralph had been, and also fully understood why Sir John was so startled and unnerved upon being suddenly confronted by his daughter the previous evening. Then, after mutual felicitations and parental blessings, they all descended the hill.

Encountering the water party near the boathouse, the news was communicated to them, and elicited warm congratulations. The Major, always ready for good-humoured banter, chaffed his nephew upon his conceit in making sure beforehand that his suit would be favourably received.

" Why, father, what do you mean ? " demanded May.

" My dear girl, do you admit that my old eyes are sharper than yours ? Pray what is the meaning of that diamond circlet upon Enid's finger ? Doesn't its presence there prove my contention ? "

" Well, uncle," interposed Enid—" for you will *really* be my uncle now, you know—I'm thankful that Ralph felt sure : although you may think me a forward minx for making such a statement."

" My dear niece—and I'm quite proud to be claimed as your uncle—I know you far too well to think you forward. You were forced to speak in Ralph's defence by reason of my attack, and I admire your candour. My nephew, by the way, has only, after the lapse of years, repaid in kind the gift you presented in the first half-hour of your acquaintance. You and he may both have forgotten the incident, but you gave him a ring before you had known him many minutes."

" Indeed *I* have not forgotten it, uncle," cried Ralph, and unfastening his vest he shewed, depending from his neck, a wash-leather bag, from which he produced the native bangle given to him by the " white girl piccaninny " fifteen years before.

" Ah, I often wondered what charm was hidden in that bag," said Mrs. Grant. " But even to me my son has never disclosed his secret."

Someone, it was never known who, must subsequently have made surreptitious use of the telephone, for towards the end of dinner the choir, reinforced by several instruments, mustered in force on the lawn and serenaded the family, afterwards giving hearty cheers for the newly-engaged couple. The cheers were taken up and repeated again and again by the crowd which had gathered in the rear, and who loudly insisted on

the doctor and his *fiancée* shewing themselves upon the verandah, their appearance being the signal for further enthusiastic applause and cries for a speech, a demand with which both Ralph and Enid good-humouredly complied.

When the General was explaining in the drawing-room his stipulation as to his daughter and her husband returning with him to England, May exclaimed, "There, Ralph, didn't I tell you that we should see you back within two years, and that you would then make Sir John Kynnersley's acquaintance? You see, my prophecy is being more than fulfilled."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"The best laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft agley."
—Burns.

RAIDERS.

PUNCTUALLY at seven o'clock on a lovely morning in early January the *Caledonia* cast off from the wharf, conveying the expedition upon the first stage of their adventurous journey, and towing the great barge, with horses, servants and baggage. It was intended to breakfast *en route*, and tie up at Waramba at noon, where Captain Brady was expected on board to meet his old comrade, Sir John Kynnersley, at luncheon, where also a sergeant and a couple of troopers were to join the party.

But one member of the expedition had perforce remained behind. For the doctor was much in request that morning. Shortly after six o'clock he had been summoned to attend one of the stockmen, a new hand, who in mounting a young and mettlesome colt, had been violently unseated, and was suffering from a broken leg and slight concussion.

The disappointment was keen ; but the lovers were of one mind as to the unmistakable call of duty, so it was understood that, if able to leave his patient in the Sister's care, Ralph would follow later in the launch, and probably overtake the *Caledonia* during the stoppage at Waramba.

How often in the course of our lives have we discovered that some unforeseen hindrance to the smooth working of our cherished plans, apparently only productive of keen disappointment and annoyance, has, in the result, tended to the perfect attainment of the very object in which we deemed ourselves cruelly

thwarted. And this was to be Ralph's experience before the day was much older.

Paying a second visit to the infirmary before going in to breakfast, he said, "Well, Sister, how is he going on?"

"Just the same, doctor; but there is something here which is rather curious"—and she pointed to a revolver lying upon the table. "That fell out of his clothes as I was handing them to the ward-maid to put away."

"Curious! It is more than curious, Sister. I cannot understand it: There is no necessity for our men to carry arms. However, I will take possession of it for the present."

Returning to the outbuildings, he summoned Mick, the head groom, and, showing him the weapon, enquired what was known of its owner.

"For mesilf, oi knows nothin' av him, Misther Ralph, except that he's a new hand who only signed on up at the office jist a week ago. And ye know sorr, there's nobody about to-day who can tell, for every available man has gone off wid Misther Webb to the round-up. Even the new vicar came along an hour ago and borrowed a hoss to ride over to Paranga."

"Oh well, there's nothing more to be said; we must wait for an explanation from the man himself. Do you know where he came from?"

"Not the laste idea, sorr, except that he's a cockney and onderstands hosses. Oi found out that much from his lingo when he rode down here yesterday wid a message. He seemed uncommon interested in your Neptune, Misther Ralph."

"Oh, did he? Well, I'm uncommonly interested in *him* just now," laughed Ralph, though the laugh

betrayed some uneasiness. "However, my breakfast is getting cold."

Shortly after ten o'clock Ralph was engaged in the dispensary, when Ah Fang, who had not accompanied the *Caledonia*, suddenly emerged from the subway, wearing a troubled expression, and in rapid sentences announced the startling news that seven armed strangers had ridden up to the house from the direction of the outbuildings.

Cautiously peering between the laths of a Venetian blind in the waiting-room, from which a view of the stable yard was obtainable, Ralph returned to the dispensary, and going to the telephone, endeavoured to ring up Waramba, but there was no response: then he tried the wharf, with a like result. It was evident that the invaders had been shrewd enough to cut the wires on their way to the house, and as his glance through the window had shown him an armed sentry at the door of the harness-room, it was clear that the grooms had been smartly trapped and placed under lock and key.

Ralph, instantly realising that alone, or with only Ah Fang's assistance, he could not openly cope with eight desperate men, spite of the fact that he still retained the revolver found by the nurse, concluded that his only possible chance was to circumvent them by guile—but how?

He stood for a moment in anxious thought, then, as a bell rang sharply in the house, his brow cleared, and, turning to the waiting Chinaman, he said, "Ah Fang, isn't that the dining-room bell?"

"Yes, sare."

"Then go back at once and answer it. Those fellows—as they always are—are probably thirsty,

and having drunk all the lemonade they found in the dining-room are ringing for something which would be more to their taste. Go and take their orders just as though they were honoured guests, and say you will bring them some brandy from the cellar. You will find me there waiting for you. I have a private key of the cellar in this drawer. Now run ; there goes another peal of the bell ! ”

Ah Fang glided away swiftly and a minute later his impassive face appeared within the dining-room door, where he calmly bowed to the unwelcome company as though the arrival of such desperadoes were a matter of daily occurrence.

“ Hi you, Johnny ! ” shouted the leader, a big and brutal looking Irishman ; “ phwat is there in the larder for us ? We want breakfast served quickly ! quickly ! ! d’ye hear ? Av coarse we’re very sorry to miss the plisure of brikfasting wid the family ; but we saw him all laving home early. Now pwhat is there ? ”

Both by nature and training Ah Fang was a master of the soft answer which turneth away wrath, and as deferentially as though acknowledging an order by a member of the family, he replied, “ Plenty good things for gentlemen, sare. Me go tellee cookee serve breakfast at once, sare. And me fetchee brandy and syphons now for gentlemen ”—and he was about to hurry away when the leader cried, “ Aye, bring brandy ; but bring some good Oirish whisky as well, and a couple of dozen of champagne.”

Ah Fang hesitated just an instant. Then, deciding that a truthful statement was the only right and wise one, he replied, “ Sare, I have been Mas’r Grant’s servant twenty-five years, and he tell me that at Bannockburn guests are always welcome to everything

the house can give ; but this is teetotal family, sare, and the brandy I will bring you is the very best Cognac. It is kept for cure snake bite. There is no other drink, sare."

" Well, well, Johnny, oi've heard that yer masther is a cursed idiot, so I suppose yer yarn's true ; but, cut along and bring what ye haye, or we'll give ye a taste of snake bite. And, hark ye, tell the cook to look alive wid the breakfast, or it'll be the worse for her ! "

Meanwhile Ralph had been busy. Directly Ah Fang left, he hurriedly snatched a phial from the shelves, and a candle, matches and sealing-wax from the table, and made his way to the cellar. Ah Fang's detention in the dining-room enabled him to complete his work, so that, by the time the butler appeared, he had uncorked eight bottles of Cognac and carefully recorked and resealed them all, after adding to each a portion of the contents of the phial taken from the dispensary shelves. " There," said he, with a sigh of satisfaction, as he placed seven of them in a basket which Ah Fang produced, " I expect they swore to burn you alive if you were not back quickly, so scamper off with those to put them in a good humour. Don't wait for the syphons. Tell them you are making a second trip for them, as you thought they would like the brandy at once."

Ah Fang's almond eyes gleamed, as in one rapid glance he took in the situation—the litter of sealing-wax, corkscrew, and ominous labelled phial—and as he mounted the stairs his face was wreathed in a contortion which denoted triumph, rather than terror.

The reader will recognize that it would have been easy for the servant to take three bottles of Cognac and three syphons, and to make a second journey to the cellar for a similar load. But Ralph reckoned on

the well-known capacity of the hard bitten bushranger for swallowing neat spirit ; hence it was his policy to keep back the syphons, in the belief that the robbers would instantly attack the brandy, without waiting for the diluting liquid. And, with the same object, he supplied one bottle for each guest.

Within five minutes the old domestic was again in the cellar, shaking with merriment. "Ah, Mas'r Ralph," he spluttered, "I specs you know what happen. When I splain bout de syphon, de cap'n he say, 'Bother de syphon ! hand over de brandy !' an' fore I lef de room de necks of all seven bottles was lyin' on de carpet. Dey gentlemen no wantee corkscrew ! "

"Good ; now take this bottle to the man guarding the harness-room, and then come back for the half-dozen syphons. But I doubt whether they will be needed."

This interval of waiting was brief. Within two minutes Ah Fang came back for the syphons, but very speedily Ralph again heard the patter of running feet, and the butler burst in, crying excitedly, "Mas'r Ralph, dey all seven on de dining-room floor, fas' asleep ! "

Not an instant was lost. Hastening to the stable-yard, they noticed as they ran that the sentry lay stretched in stupor before the door he was supposed to guard. Quickly releasing the imprisoned grooms, Ralph bade two of them tie up the sentry, while the others accompanied him to the house, carrying sufficient straps and stout halters to secure the seven remaining visitors, and the men were delighted to turn the tables upon their late captors. The process of relieving them of their weapons and deftly pinioning them was quickly got through, and presently eight inert and mummified forms were laid in a row upon the harness-

room floor, there to await the arrival of the police.

This task accomplished, Ralph wrote a hasty note to Captain Brady, the District Inspector, and despatched a groom upon one of the fastest horses, with orders not to spare his mount. As the man was starting, Ralph stopped him with the enquiry, "Are you a good revolver shot?"

"Faix, he's the best av us, Misther Ralph," said Mick, "he's took fust prize agin and agin."

"Capital; then take this revolver, and don't hesitate to use it if any one attempts to stop you. These fellows seem to have come here in the belief that the place was practically deserted; but it won't do to take any risks, they may have placed sentries on both the roads. Now get away my man, and do the twenty-five miles in record time!"

As the groom dashed out of the yard, Ralph ordered his own and two other horses to be saddled. And, explaining to Mick that although it was obviously his first duty to send a galloper for the police, he meant if possible to repair the broken wires, desired him to provide a couple of handy men and the necessary tools. "You, Ah Fang, run to the gun room and bring a dozen revolvers and a box of cartridges; take a couple of men to help you."

The horses, the tools, and the weapons arrived simultaneously, and Ralph was just giving orders to the butler as to quarters and a meal for the police, when the sound of a shot, followed by two others in rapid succession, was borne down upon the wind!

"Ah, that fust one was the sentry ye thought av, sorr, said Mick, an' Smith has got in a double answer."

"Then you come as well, Mick, and bring the men with wire and tools; but first distribute those revolvers."

and place some men to guard the prisoners, we can't afford to omit any precautions. If there are more of the scamps still at large they might attempt a rescue. I'll hurry on, I may be needed," and, mounting Neptune, he followed his messenger at a gallop.

After five minutes' hard riding, the Waramba road opened before him, and in the distance, almost obscured by the cloud of dust his horse was raising, he could see the groom speeding uninterrupted upon his errand. Satisfied upon this point, he narrowly scanned the outskirts of the wood, and speedily found what Mick's testimony as to Smith's achievements as a prize-winner had led him to expect.

In the scrub, a few yards from the road, lay a struggling horse, and close beside him the motionless form of his unseated rider. In a moment a shot had put the poor horse out of its misery, and then the doctor knelt to ascertain the nature of the man's injuries. Apparently he had been stunned by the fall, for Smith's bullet, which had passed clean through the fleshy part of the right forearm, would hardly have produced a swoon in the case of a rough fellow accustomed to a hard life and hard knocks.

Mick now rode up with his two assistants, and as the doctor, upon cutting away the injured man's clothing, found several broken ribs and such severe contusions as indicated that the mischief had been caused by a kick from the dying horse, he promptly sent one of the men back to the infirmary for a stretcher and bearers, for, said he to Mick, "Bushranger or not, the poor chap is very seriously injured, and I cannot allow myself to forget that I'm a doctor."

"Bless ye, Misther Ralph, it's a mercy for him and for us all that ye are a docthor: but Jim's gone like

the wind, so he won't be long afore he's back wid help. So we'll go and mend thim wires, for oi expect they've bin cut jist beyant the wood, where the two for the wharf branch off."

Left alone with the wounded man, the doctor had leisure to note his somewhat peculiar face. It was clean-shaven, but there was an old fracture of the bridge of the nose which gave an expression not easily forgotten, and the watcher had a hazy but growing belief that he had somewhere seen that face before.

However, his cogitations on the point were interrupted by the arrival from opposite directions, of the repairing party, whose mission had been speedily accomplished, and the stretcher and bearers for the unfortunate and still unconscious man. Spreading a blanket on the stretcher under the doctor's directions, the grooms very gently lifted the sufferer on to it.

"Now carry him steadily to the infirmary—to No. 1 ward, mind. I don't want the 'other patient to see him, or to know that he is there. You will please repeat this to Sister, and tell her it is very important. If I am not there to meet you, place the stretcher carefully down in the waiting-room and call Sister, she'll know what to do until I come. But remember, the door between the two wards must be closed before you carry the stretcher into No. 1." So saying, he remounted, and galloping back to the house, went straight to the telephone and rang up Waramba. To his intense relief all fears as to a possible double breakage were set at rest by a prompt reply from the Exchange, and a moment later came the welcome announcement, "You are through to the police," followed instantly by a gruff enquiry from the station sergeant.

"Is that Sergeant Croker? I am Dr. Grant, of

Bannockburn. I want to speak to Captain Brady, please."

"Yes, sir, I'll fetch him."

"Ah, Ralph, my dear boy, what do you want with me?" came through in the Captain's breezy tones.

"I've just left all your people. They sent me back home to fetch my wife and Nora to luncheon on board the *Caledonia*. They were hoping that you would catch them up. How is it you haven't started?"

As briefly as possible the occurrences of the morning were related. Then came the words, "Bravo, Ralph! I've never listened to a more thrilling tale. An astounding mixture of tragedy and comedy. Me dear lad, you've earned the thanks of the State parliament, and be jabbers ye'll get it, too! Why those scamps have harried three colonies, and deserve hanging ten times over. It's their first visit to this side, however, and to think they should walk into such a trap when they must have supposed they had a clear field! Well, *au revoir*. I won't let the grass grow. It's just noon now. I'll hope to be with you by three o'clock at latest. We'll ride round by the wharf on our way out of the town, and send your great expedition home again. I don't suppose your father would care to go on under the circumstances."

"No, certainly not. Besides, I'm half disposed to think the expedition may be abandoned altogether; but I'll explain when you arrive. By-the-bye, I sent off a groom to you half-an-hour ago; you'll meet him on the road. Good-bye!"

"Hold on a minute! Mind you keep double sentries on those beggars, or they'll slip through your fingers!"

"I don't fancy they will," laughed Ralph, "Ah Fang superintended the binding."

" Oh, begorra ! he did, did he ? Then I'm thankful I'm not one of them. Trust a heathen Chinee for trussing up his captives ! "

" Captain Brady, we are both in a hurry, but I must keep you a moment longer. You have slandered my father's faithful servant ; he is *not* a heathen."

" Oh, I forgot ; I humbly apologise. Any way, I hope, for your sake, the converted Chinaman hasn't forgotten how he used to tie knots when he *was* a heathen ! And now it's ' Boot and saddle,' so good-bye."

Then the wharf was rung up, and very startling was the reply.

" I'm locked in the office, Mr. Ralph," said the foreman, " and there are two rascals outside on guard. Luckily they're talking at the other end of the wharf just now, or they'd have heard the bell. They've got Jamieson shut up in the cabin of the launch. When they came down about two hours ago my first thought was to ring up the house, but they jeered at me, saying the wires were cut, so I suppose you've had them mended. What has happened at the house, sir. ? "

Ralph told him.

" And now, what can I do, sir ? "

" Why, what *can* you do, Maynard ? I've sent for the police, and expect them by three o'clock, so all you need do is to ' sit tight ' until you're released, only I fear you'll be rather hungry."

" Yes sir, but I'll put up with that. Those thieves have stolen our dinner, and precious angry they were when they found there was nothing stronger than tea to wash it down ! They're walking this way, sir ! "—

Ralph was about to ring up the manager's office, when it occurred to him that probably there were sentries there also, and one of them very likely in th_e

office, or so near that he would hear the bell, and thus—knowing that the wires had been cut—learn that the great raid had miscarried. In that case they would not only ride off and so escape capture, but possibly murder the inmates of the house before going. So he decided to leave them undistrubed for the present.

Swallowing a glassful of egg-and-milk and pocketing a biscuit that the thoughtful Ah Fang brought him, and hearing with satisfaction that the eight bushrangers were still in the land of dreams, he then hastened to the infirmary and found that the wounded man had been undressed and put to bed.

A critical examination more than confirmed his previous hasty diagnosis. It was quite clear that the bullet wound was a trifling matter ; but on the other hand both lung and heart had been gravely injured by the fractured ribs, and there could be no chance whatever of saving the patient's life. Indeed, when the doctor recalled Captain Brady's ominous remark, he could not but feel a sense of relief that the responsibility of bringing the poor wretch back from the gates of the grave, only to hand him over to the hangman, was not to rest upon his shoulders. The issue of life or death was already decided ; within twenty-four hours the man would have passed beyond reach of human justice. Having done what he could to afford any mitigation of suffering, and left instructions with the Sister, he returned to the dining-room, where luncheon awaited him. Sending for Mick, he enquired as to the occupants of the harness-room.

" Snoring away, sorr, as if they'd been widout sleep for years and were makin' up for lost toime."

" That's right, they'll probably sleep for some hours longer."

CHAPTER XIX.

"The expectation of the wicked shall perish."—*Proverbs X v. 28.*

BAFFLED.

"NOW listen to me, Mick," said the doctor. "The police are on their way, and will reach here about three o'clock. So we've an hour and a half to wait. *We* can afford to wait patiently ; but I have discovered that there are two sentries at the wharf, where Maynard and Jamieson are under lock and key. Now it is practically certain that there are more of the rogues up at Mr. Webb's house. What I fear is that these fellows must be getting restive at not hearing from their chief, for it is three hours and a half since they rode in. You see, for Mrs. Webb's sake, it is scarcely safe to wait until the police arrive. If these men become suspicious they may bolt, and I should certainly like to capture the whole gang."

"Oh, begorra, we mustn't let them slip through our fingers, sorr. Did ye telephone to Mrs. Webb ? "

"No, I hesitated, although I was on the point of doing so. You see, they know the wires were cut, and the sound of the bell would give us away at once."

"Ah, oi didn't tell ye, sorr. Thim wires *wern't* cut. They'd only cut the wharf and the Waramba lines."

"Not cut !" exclaimed Ralph in astonishment. "Ah, I see what it means. Their captain must have purposely left the line open, so that he might summon the sentries to join him here, or get news from them of anyone approaching from that side. Ah ! there goes the bell ! You must answer it, Mick. You can

probably disguise your voice much better than I. If they are seeking instructions tell them to ride in."

Taking up the duplicate receiver, Ralph listened with interest and amusement to the following dialogue. Certainly Mick assumed tones which would have done credit to the most abandoned bushranger in the country.

Caller : " We're getting about tired o' waitin' out here. Are ye goin' to be a month o' Sundays ? Ye've had time to clear out a dozen bloomin' safes."

Mick : " There's been no end o' bother with this un. It's some blessed new-fangled make, a bloomin' ' Yankee notion,' oi guess. Annyway it aint open yet, an' the boss sez ye can ride in if ye loike."

Caller : " What ! the two of us ? "

Mick : " Aye, both ! Cap'n doesn't seem to care whether ye stop or come in ; he's swigged so much brandy he don't seem to rightly know what he's about."

Caller : " Well, we'll be precious glad to get out o' this hole, for there aint a drop o' spirits in the place."

Mick : " Then be smart about it, before all the bloomin' brandy's drunk. It's prime stuff, me bhoy ! "

Caller : " You bet ! So long."

" Very good indeed, Mick. Now get a dozen men to horse instantly, and we'll nab these fellows at the father end of the wood, before they see that dead horse."

" Ah, yes, bedad, oi'd forgotten that Are ye comin' wid us, sorr ? "

" Yes, most certainly I'm coming. Here, take this revolver. I have another couple upstairs." And so they cantered out of the yard fourteen strong, and each one carrying a revolver.

Breaking into a gallop, Ralph gave Mick, as they rode side by side, instructions to take six men into the bush on the right of the road at the point where the

horse was lying. He himself would, with the other six, enter the shelter of the wood on the left, fifty yards further on. His party would shoot the bushrangers' horses as they passed, and Mick and his men were to bar the road in front directly they heard the firing.

"Two men on foot will scarcely show fight against fourteen who are mounted, eh Mick?"

"Oi'm none so certain about that, sorr. Remimber, they'll be fightin' wid halters round their necks, as the sayin' is."

"Well, whether they fight or not, we've got to take them alive. Now, quickly to your post!"

They were scarcely in concealment before the sound of furious galloping was heard. Everything was carried out without a hitch, for the seven shots not only brought the horses to the ground, but their riders were thrown so violently as to be quite incapable of rising without assistance; within a quarter of an hour they were escorted to the house by four of the party, and, after drinking a tumblerful apiece of the drugged Cognac which Mick had promised them, they were laid to rest by the side of their eight still slumbering comrades.

Ralph and the other nine grooms rode rapidly on to the manager's house, and 'twas well they did so, for the two clerks were discovered bound and gagged in the ransacked office, while poor Mrs. Webb and her two maids had been locked in one of the upper rooms, without food or water. By the time all were released and were busy upon a hastily prepared meal, the clock chimed half-past two, and Ralph, after assuring Mrs. Webb that there was no further cause for alarm, ordered his men to mount, while he telephoned to the infirmary for news of the two patients. Sister reported that the second case showed no change whatever, there was

still profound insensibility. The stockman in No. 2 ward was fully conscious, but appeared to be strangely restless and nervous.

"Ah, has he asked any questions?"

"No, he seems rather to fear my speaking to him."

"Good. Then I may tell you, Sister, that I shall probably remove him from that ward on my return, and meanwhile please leave him to sulk as much as he may wish. Happily the fractured leg will prevent his leaving his bed."

As Ralph vaulted into the saddle a man rode up with the welcome news that the police were in sight, and in a few minutes they halted, dusty and dishevelled, after their hard ride in the hottest hours of the day. The police horses were hastily watered and rubbed down by the grooms, while the troopers thankfully drank off a plentiful supply of home-made lemonade which Mrs. Webb and the maids brought out to them.

In a few sentences the state of things down at the wharf was explained, and Captain Brady ordered a sergeant and three troopers to accompany eight grooms, and, dividing forces, to converge upon the wharf from opposite sides. Mick remained with his young master.

"Well, my boy," broke out the captain, as he and Ralph rode leisurely towards the house to an accompaniment of the jingling bits and accoutrements of the ten troopers who followed, "well, my boy, so the total capture—if they take those other two beauties down by the river, which of course they will—reaches thirteen, instead of nine you mentioned on the telephone. It's as well I brought a strong party. I hesitated about denuding that end of my district, but I'm very glad now that I did. Some of these fellows have slipped through the hands of the police before to-day—that

wretch Kavanagh especially. I sha'n't have a moment's peace till they're all safely lodged in gaol. As for you, my dear Ralph, it's a *general* you should call yourself, not a doctor at all."

"No, no," laughed Ralph; "it was because I *am* a doctor and happened to be engaged in the duties of my calling that I not only thought of drugging the Cognac, but could at once lay my hands upon the means of doing so. Any other medical man would have done the same."

"Would he, then? Indeed, it's not one in ten thousand would have thought of it, or have had the resource and the nerve to carry out the whole lovely scheme. I'll stick to my opinion, my dear boy, it's a born general, ye are! But now, there's something else I was nearly forgetting. We met your messenger, looking as fresh as paint; but he told me you'd ordered him not to spare his nag, and faith he hadn't! So I told him to off-saddle and rest for a couple of hours, and then ride gently home.

"He gave us some ugly news. About a couple of miles back, said he, he'd passed the mail cart on the road, the horse dead in the shafts, the driver nowhere to be seen. When we reached the spot we searched the bush for five hundred yards on either side of the road, and found poor Wilson tied to a tree in a brutal fashion, and stone dead, with a couple of dozen bullet holes in his body; the fiends had evidently made a target of the poor man. He was a good steady fellow, and leaves a wife and child, so I'm hoping the Government will do something for them, poor things. The inbound carrier came up while we were there and took the body back with him to Waramba. As to the letters, the scamps had apparently made a bonfire of them.

"You won't be surprised to hear that your relatives

were uncommonly startled when, instead of arriving for a pleasant luncheon, they beheld an armed body of fifteen police at my back, and learned that our objective was Bannockburn ! However, they were quite reassured when I told them all I had learned from you ; but, naturally, the expedition was ' off,' and before we were out of sight the *Caledonia* was steaming homewards. That was just half-past twelve : what time will they arrive, do you think ? "

" By water the distance is thirty-seven miles, and they are coming up stream, and with the barge in tow. They ought to be up here between seven and eight o'clock."

" That's all right. By that time we shall have cleared off with our prisoners, and you'll have made everything ship-shape, so that the ladies may find no shocking traces of the fray on their return."

" No, indeed," expostulated Ralph, " I demurred to your styling me a general, but really I must accept the title, and what is more, assert my authority. I protest against your clearing off, as you term it. You have ridden twenty-five miles at speed, and both horses and men will be the better for a good rest. We have ample accommodation for the whole party, and my father, I know, would be greatly vexed to find you gone when he reaches home. Besides, although you of course met Sir John Kynnersley this morning, you were baulked of the luncheon, so he also would be disappointed. I know he would enjoy a chat over the old times when you were comrades."

" Stay ! stay ! my boy," said the Inspector, excitedly, " or your seductive tongue will sap my sense of duty. It's my duty to see these blackguards under lock and key at Waramba, and, by the powers, ye sha'n't stop

me ! Why, man alive, I should deserve to be cashiered if I lingered here taking my pleasure with old friends, when I rode out for the one purpose of escorting thirteen desperate cut-throats well on their way to the gallows ; and bedad, if I know John Kynnersley, he'd be the very first to condemn me ! ”

“ Now, Captain, it's my turn to cry ‘ stay ! ’ So pray stop both your horse and the flow of your language, for here we are at the house, and I have more to say.”

“ Halt ! ” cried the Inspector “ Now, out with it, Ralph, for we haven't a minute to spare ! ”

“ What I was about to add before you stopped me would have met your objections thoroughly. Pray remember, you credited me with the qualities of a general, so I must try to live up to the part. A storm is brewing, and we may have a rough night. And, even if the storm passes over, the night will be dark, for there is no moon. We are not certain that the whole band is captured. Indeed, from what you say about the attack on the mail, it was possibly the work of men left behind to watch the road. What would be easier than for those fellows to create a diversion at some favourable point ? Even if they didn't succeed in rescuing any of your prisoners, they could inflict very serious damage, and you would be sure to lose several of your men and horses. If you had double your present strength you might beat off any sudden attack, but there are only sixteen, including yourself, to convey twelve unwounded and desperate criminals. Now I put it to you on the ground of your own plea of duty, that the primary aim should not be merely to conduct those men, but to conduct them under such conditions that they will be absolutely certain to arrive at Waramba safely. Here, at Bannockburn, they are

as secure as if in Adelaide itself, for not only are there your fifteen troopers, but we can add another fifty guards, aye, even a hundred if need be, every one of them armed and trustworthy. So I confidently appeal to you to remain here to-night in perfect security, and start to-morrow morning as early as you please, with the whole day before you."

Captain Brady's expressive features spoke eloquently of puzzled admiration, and impulsively grasping Ralph's hand, he cried, "Doctor, indeed! It's a combination of Lord High Chancellor and Field-Marshal ye are, avick! I've never met your like, never in the worrlid. I'll most humbly obey your orders, my lord! Now show me the prisoners!"

"I will, Captain; but first let me give you one parting shot. *You couldn't have gone to-night, for they're all lying as senseless and inert as so many logs.*"

"Ye young spalpeen, why didn't ye say so at first?"

"Because you raised the question of *duty*, and I wanted to convince you logically, that it was your duty to remain where you are—and I did."

"True for ye, Ralph, I'll admit it; but, you rascal, I'll be even with ye one of these days, or my name isn't Jim Brady!"

Presently the District Inspector paced the length of the harness-room, critically scrutinizing each ill-favoured face. "Yes," he said at last, "this is Kavanagh's band. That is the arch villain himself." Then an exclamation, "I wondered whether those fellows had joined him, and now here they are. Look ye there, Ralph, the second and fifth from the wall. Those two men broke gaol five years ago, on the eve of the day fixed for their execution for bank robbery and the murder of the manager. There was no doubt

at the time they were helped from outside, and their being here proves it."

"By the way, your men removed their arms, but have they been searched?"

"No, that office was of course left for the police."

"Then it shall be done at once, and all of them together: here we have the last couple." For at that moment the wharf party, including the liberated foreman and engineer, rode up with their two prisoners, and the whole being now in custody, the sergeant was ordered to thoroughly search and manacle them, "Though, by the way, Ralph, we shall have to borrow some of your rope a little while longer, for you see we only brought irons for nine."

"Borrow it, by all means. And now may I suggest a variation of your orders? It has just struck four, and I'm sure all your men are ready for the square meal which I know has been prepared for them. So just dismiss them for the present, and you come along and have a bath, and I'll join you at table when you are ready."

An hour later, when baths and a meal had been disposed of, and the two gentlemen sat on the terrace outside the dining-room windows, enjoying a smoke, Ralph said, "There was yet another reason for my wishing your return delayed until to-morrow, but as it was in a sense personal I did not advance it. However, before I speak of that, there is a point of considerable importance. It has probably struck you as remarkable that this attack by bushrangers, which, under the ordinary conditions of Bannockburn life, would have been utterly impracticable and futile, should have occurred on the very day that the place was practically deserted. Mr. Webb had gathered in all the available

men to-day at Paranga, fully twenty miles away. The search expedition not only included all the family and visitors (for my remaining behind was in a sense purely accidental), but at least a dozen menservants, besides the steamer's crew. Thus it was upon an unprotected place that these vultures swooped down, and the leader actually told Ah Fang that they had watched the departure of the *Caledonia*."

"Why, of course, Ralph, it's as plain as can be, there's a traitor in the camp. I thought you said all your fellows were trustworthy."

"Yes, they are. The traitor, I am assured, is a man who only signed on a week ago, and ought to have been with Mr. Webb to-day. But early this morning he was thrown, and his leg was fractured. My own opinion is that he was mounting—not to serve my father—but to rejoin his real employer, Kavanagh, for whom he had been playing spy. A revolver fell from his pocket when his clothes were being put away, and the Sister tells me that he appears to be very nervous and fidgety."

"My dear fellow, that's the *fourteenth*! What a capture!" And the Inspector rubbed his hands gleefully.

"Yes, Captain, there can be little doubt of it; but I want to verify my suspicions by confronting him with those two men last brought in, and if you've finished that cigar we'll go at once. We can come back for another smoke presently, for I have much more to tell you."

Going across to the infirmary by the subway, they went into Ralph's den, where the Sister reported that there was no change in the No. 2 ward case, but that No. 1 was very restless and feverish, although still unconscious.

" By the way, doctor, what sort of man is this supposed spy ? " asked the Captain.

" Fair, tall, and, I'm told, speaks with a strong Cockney accent, and has considerable knowledge of horses."

The Inspector started, then quietly observed, " I should like to see your patient, if you please."

They went together to the bedside, and the man, seeing them coming, drew the sheet partly over his face and feigned sleep. But the Captain was not to be balked, and, snatching away the covering, remarked, " So, Mr. William Hawkins, you are back at your old games. Well, as soon as the doctor will allow you to travel, we'll find you quarters which will not be quite so comfortable."

The detected spy glared angrily, but said nothing in reply, and his two visitors returned to the consulting room, where, as he threw himself into one of the capacious easy chairs, Captain Brady chuckled with satisfaction, and exclaimed, " Better and better, my lord. You are fast robbing the criminal class of the Australian continent of some of its most conspicuous ornaments, the very *élite*. That man would inform you, were he disposed to speak the truth, and speak it in his peculiar style of language, that his name is Bill 'Awkins, that his residence at 'Ackney was invaded in the dead of night by 'tecs' who had the bad taste to haccuse him of forging the name of his hmployer, a wealthy 'orse dealer, resident at 'Erne 'Ill, and that on this charge, though habsolutely hinnocent, he was convicted, and was one of the last batch of convicts sent out to make our lives a burden to us in this continent. Now, how soon can he be moved ? "

" Well, by *water* he could go at once. He could be

sent down to-morrow in the launch to meet you at Waramba."

" That would be admirable. Would you mind one of my men being placed in the ward to keep an eye on him ? "

" Certainly not. Let a trooper come immediately. He shall have a comfortable chair and a lamp, and plenty of literature. And now, that matter being settled, there is something else of far greater importance—at least to me and my family. I am particularly anxious to spend the night by the bedside of that dying man in No. 1 ward. He will certainly be delirious, and, do you know, I am convinced that he is the very man whom I shot fifteen years ago, as he was about to shoot Enid. I was a boy at the time, so he would not recognise me, but no one who had ever seen that face could possibly forget it. Now that was what was in my mind when I told you the expedition might be abandoned."

" I see, you think this man could give you the information you want ? "

" I feel sure of it. When I remember his desperate effort to murder a sweet child of four, I cannot but think that this man holds the key to the mystery of Mrs. Barton's presence in Australia. I will not say of her death, for that arose from natural causes, though doubtless hastened by reason of the hardships she must have endured."

" I believe you are on the right track, Ralph, and if, as I suppose you mean, he is likely to make involuntary revelations—not to say confessions—during the night, I hope you'll allow me to share your vigil. You see, I might learn something that would further the ends of justice. Though, when I think of that dear bereaved

man, whose life has been lonely and embittered, and of his poor young wife dying in the care of black gins, and of that lovely child spending four years amongst them, why—I'm disposed to forget all about justice, and just take the law into my own hands and slay the brute."

"I trust," said Ralph, playfully, "you'll try and put a curb upon that feeling, or else I shall have to assert my authority as a doctor, although my patient is a bushranger and probably a murderer. Still, I should like to have you here. I'll order a bed to be made up for you in the waiting-room, so that you will be at hand when wanted—but not a word of this to anyone else, if you please. The Sister is going to her room, for she has had a long hard day, and I cannot have her breaking down from overwork. And now, I know you won't think me discourteous if I turn in till dinner-time, for I have to be up all night. Make yourself thoroughly at home. I daresay you would like to ride down to the wharf about seven o'clock : take any horse you fancy."

CHAPTER XX.

“ Only a burden ever the same
Asleep or awake I bore,
A dead soul in a living frame
That would quicken never more.”

—J. Brunton Stevens.

ANOTHER MYSTERY SOLVED.

THE Inspector's first act on leaving the infirmary was to summon his sergeant, receive a report of the search, and inspect the spoils—an interesting and highly suggestive assortment. Not only was the whole of the cash stolen from the office safe recovered, but a large sum in gold and notes besides, not to mention much valuable jewellery, rings, pins, watches and chains.

At seven o'clock he rode to the wharf, where after only a few minutes' waiting the *Caledonia*'s whistle was heard, then as she rounded the bend and came alongside, he was amazed to find his wife and daughter among her passengers.

“ We insisted upon it, Captain Brady,” said Mrs. Grant, “ for my husband was quite sure Ralph would keep you for the night.”

“ Well, we had a tough argument about it, but I gave in at last, for he demonstrated quite clearly that my duty and my inclination would on this occasion run well in double harness. By the powers, that son of yours is a marvel, a perfect genius. Here was a gang of villainous bushrangers, who have been carrying out theft and arson and murder on and off in three colonies for nearly twenty years, and have evaded and escaped the police again and again, and now your son quietly steps in and captures the lot single-handed ! However,

now that you are all mounted, I'll continue my story as we ride, for the doctor bade me make his excuses, as he's trying to snatch a little sleep, and I was to tell you that dinner has been ordered for eight o'clock." Then the voluble Irishman proceeded with his tale, but added so much in the way of embellishment that the story remained still unfinished when the house was reached and the travellers dispersed to dress for dinner.

Ralph appeared in the drawing-room when all the others were assembled, and parried the outburst of congratulation by attempting to quiz the members of the expedition upon their remarkably rapid return, declaring that it reminded him irresistibly of the couplet—

‘The king of France, with forty thousand men,
Marched up the hill—and then marched down
again !’

But it was of no use. Everyone was determined, and each had some word to say on the one-absorbing topic, when happily for the doctor's feelings dinner was announced. During the meal he chatted freely with Enid, but otherwise was silent and preoccupied, and when dessert was reached he excused himself on the plea of anxiety as to his patients, and bade goodnight.

No sooner had the door closed, than Captain Brady was called upon to resume his story, a request with which he promptly complied. Then Ah Fang and Mick were in turn summoned and made to relate in extenso the incidents of the day, which no one had been able to extract from the chief actor.

When, later, all were assembled in the drawing-room, Captain Brady, laying a small parcel on the table, said “There is one sad tragedy of which you have not yet been told”—and he related the story of the attack

upon the mail cart, with which the reader is already familiar.

"I concluded," he continued, "that the thieves, whoever they might be, had abstracted everything of value, and then made a bonfire of the letters. The identity of the villains is now clearly established, for the missing valuables have been found by my men in the pockets of the prisoners lying in the harness-room. If you will kindly glance at the contents of this parcel, you will, I daresay, identify the articles. First there is an official letter for you, Sir John; apparently Kavanagh had some reason for preserving it, for all the rest have been destroyed. Then there are several cheques and a £50 bank-note. The cheques are all payable to your order, Grant, so I suppose the scamp was intending a little forgery. He must have had some scheme for negotiating them, or they would have been burned with the letters. The ownership of the bank note is of course more difficult to determine, unless it can be identified through bearing the endorsement 'T. J. Dodderidge,' and his address, 'Katanga Station.'"

"Ah, then there can be no question to whom it belongs," said Mrs. Woodward, "for as Mr. Dodderidge was leaving here after the consecration of the new church, he told me he intended to send Enid £50 for her Chinese Mission fund. He had been so much interested in hearing about it."

"Good. Then Enid, I have pleasure in handing you the note, clearly your property. And now the only article remaining is a jeweller's box bearing the label of a Melbourne firm, and containing something very carefully packed in cotton wool."

"I admire your professional caution, Brady," laughed Sir John, "but I fancy I can set your scruples

at rest. If you will kindly open the watch which you appear to be concealing there, you will find, I think, a certain inscription."

" You are right," said the Captain. " You are the undoubted owner."

" Ah, what is that, may I ask ? " said the Squatter.

" That," said Sir John, passing on a handsome gold hunter for inspection, " is a little keepsake for Jenkins, which I hope he will kindly accept from me."

The watch was passed from hand to hand and much admired. Within the case were engraved these words, " Corporal Jenkins, from his grateful friend John Kynnersley. ' I was a stranger and ye took me in.' "

" From what I have seen of Jenkins, I fancy he will want to substitute another text for that, Sir John " said Carew.

" Indeed, what other ? "

" Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have entertained angels unawares," he replied.

" Ah, very good, Carew," said Major Woodward. " I sha'n't be at all surprised if the good chap does exactly what you suggest."

" And now, Mrs. Grant, I must crave leave to retire," said Captain Brady ; " I have to make a final inspection and also to see the doctor, and must be on the march with my prisoners at daybreak."

" By the way, Brady," interposed the Squatter, " with regard to what you were telling us of your arrangement with my son, I fancy I can improve on his plan. You naturally want to get your prisoners oft your hands as quickly and securely as possible, and so shift the responsibility to other shoulders. If you ride to Waramba that will only be one stage, and every

change and stoppage will mean additional risk. Let me place my steamer at your disposal for the whole journey from here to Morgan ; she can tow the barge with your troop-horses and the bushrangers' nags. The barge can be dropped at Waramba as you pass, and the Government can send up a special train to meet you at Morgan, with police from the capital to take charge of your prisoners. How does that strike you ? ”

“ Faith, it's simply perfect. I'll telephone to Adelaide at once, by your leave.” And within a few minutes the good news was known at the Government offices, all arrangements for transporting the captured felons were definitely settled, and through the indefatigable Reuter the story was flashed round the world and appeared in the evening editions of that day's London papers.

Meanwhile the doctor, on his way back, had summoned a groom and despatched him to Corporal Jenkins, requesting his presence at the infirmary as speedily as possible. “ Take a spare horse with you, tell him how sorry I am to bring him here after he has been in the saddle all day, but say that it is of vital importance, and say also that his wife must not sit up for him. He shall sleep here—that is, if either of us gets any sleep,” he muttered, as the man turned to go.

Sending Sister Millicent away for the night, Ralph sat thoughtfully in his den and remained undisturbed for an hour, when Corporal Jenkins was shown up,

“ Well, Jenkins, I suppose you have heard of the day's doings as you came along ? ”

“ I have, sir. The Lord be praised for His mercy ! ”

“ Yes, indeed,” echoed the doctor. “ But now, Jenkins, I want you to come with me into No. 1 ward.

for a moment. I daresay you were told that one of the bushrangers was very seriously injured."

Jenkins followed to where the patient lay in troubled semi-consciousness, and started as his gaze fell upon the face on the pil'ow.

" Why, Master Ralph," he exclaimed, in an excited undertone, " I know that face ; it has haunted me for years. That's the man you shot the night Miss Enid was rescued."

" You are right. I felt sure of it myself, but wanted your confirmation. And yet there is a difference which I can't understand or explain. Do you detect it ? "

As Ralph put the question, he glanced up from the figure on the bed to the man at his side, and noticing the puzzled intensity of the Corporal's gaze, he waited patiently for the solution ; but it came at last with a force and of a nature he had little anticipated.

For a full minute the old soldier stood as though he had not heard. Then suddenly the tense features relaxed, and, first uttering a sigh of relieved bewilderment, he broke the silence of the ward by crying in ringing and peremptory military tones—" Private Edwards ! "

The eyes of the injured man opened wide, his form became rigid, with a strong clear voice he answered— " Here ! "—and relapsed once more into a state of coma.

" Ah, I knew it, I knew it ! " murmured the Corporal, greatly agitated, as the doctor drew him hastily from the bedside and back to his room.

As they reached it, Captain Brady appeared in the vestibule, and beckoning him to join them, Ralph closed the door sufficiently to enable him to detect any sounds from the ward, while preventing their conversation being overheard.

As Captain Brady entered, Jenkins drew himself up stiffly and saluted; but the genial officer, gripping the Corporal's hand, exclaimed, "Oh hang it, man; no ceremony of that kind. We fought the Queen's enemies together more than twenty years ago, and I'm proud to shake hands with a true soul like you. I'd just be asking ye, Jenkins, did Sir John acknowledge your salute the other day when he learned who you were?"

"No sir," said the old soldier, with proud emotion, "the General gave me his hand. Bless him!"

"Ah, bedad, and didn't I know it? And do you think a mere retired Captain mayn't do what was no disgrace to a General? I only hope you'll say of me as you did just now of Sir John, 'Bless him.' I somehow feel that the blessing of a good man like you, Jenkins, is worth having."

"Thank you, sir, with all my heart."

"And now," interposed the doctor, "sit down, please, both of you"; and he briefly told why he had sent for Jenkins, and of the incident beside the bed.

Captain Brady whistled. "More sensations! This is most amazing!" said he. Then Jenkins was desired to tell his story.

"You will remember, sir," said he, addressing his former officer, "that night twenty years ago, when Major Woodward was shot during dinner. As there was a good deal of sniping going on at the time, everyone supposed that the shot, although from a service rifle, was fired by the enemy, for it was known that they had got hold of some Enfields. And when at midnight Private Edwards of Captain Barton's company, who was on sentry-go, was found to be missing, it was concluded that he had been captured and carried off

by the enemy. But the discovery I have just made tells, to my mind, a different and very terrible story.

"I knew Edwards well. We were both Welshmen, and we often chatted together when off duty, and I know that at the time of the shooting he was very bitter against Captain Barton. He had no cause to be, for the Captain was very thoughtful for his men, and they'd have done anything for him. But Edwards was a hard drinker and a surly ill-conditioned fellow, who was always getting into trouble and being reported, and he got the idea that his frequent punishments were the result of his Captain's dislike of him, rather than—as everybody knew but himself—his own blackguardly ways. At the very time the regiment was ordered to the front he was doing a term in the cells, and was only released because every available man was wanted with the colours.

"Well, gentlemen, what I see now, as clear as day, is that it was Edwards who wounded and well-nigh killed Major Woodward. You will remember, sir, that the Major rose suddenly, and was struck in the shoulder as he got on his feet. It was remarked at the time that, had he remained in his chair, the bullet would have reached Captain Barton, who was seated exactly opposite. Edwards, bad man though he was, had one quality which others admired—he was far and away the best marksman in the regiment. Don't you see, sir, it was not a chance sniping shot by a tribesman, but the sure aim of a revengeful soldier, and 'but for the Major getting in the line of fire Captain Barton would have been killed !'"

"Dear, dear, there can be no doubt of it," broke in Captain Brady ; "but go on, Jenkins, you have more to say."

"I have, sir. When Mr. Ralph sent for me to see if I could recognise the man who tried to murder Miss Enid fifteen years ago, it was because there was something different about the face, although the peculiar breakage of the nose was not to be mistaken. Well, sir, the very thing that so puzzled him was what helped me to recognize that man as my old comrade. It's this, sir, *he's now clean-shaven, just as he was in the army!* When we saw him last his face was covered with hair."

"Of course," exclaimed Ralph, "I distinctly remember now. He wore a heavy black beard."

"Well, gentlemen, this seems quite plain to my mind. Private Edwards deserted that night, and he must have made his way by some means down to Calcutta and shipped on board the very vessel in which Mrs. Barton had taken passage to England. We know that she, poor lady, reached Australia; we know that her child was born here; we know now that Edwards has also been in this country for many years. So we have several fresh and unexpected links in the chain, but it is from this scoundrel himself we shall have to find out why that ship has never been heard of since the day she left the Hooghly, and how a passenger by her for England came to be found in the Australian bush."

"You have expressed the whole matter very vividly and convincingly, Jenkins," said Ralph, "and I may tell you what Captain Brady already knows, that I anticipate our getting important information from this man. He is very feverish, his pulse is rapid, and in the course of the night he will probably divulge secrets which will be of the utmost importance. You shall be called if that happens, but now you must lie down on

the couch. Captain Brady has a bed in the next room."

Towards midnight, the patient became increasingly restless, and the doctor repeatedly administered cooling draughts and applied ice to the temples ; but at half-past twelve he summoned both the sleepers, giving them chairs on either side of the bed, while he himself sat with notebook and pencil on the table before him, prepared to take down in shorthand every utterance of the sick man.

The arrangements were barely complete, and the door between the two wards closed, before the incoherent mutterings ceased, and with a scream the bushranger covered his face with his free hand, as though to shut out some terrifying vision. The ice bandage was renewed, but, with an imprecation, the man tore it off, crying, "Don't touch me, Captain Barton. Why can't you leave me alone ? You are everlastinglly following me about, asking what I've done with her. I've told you every night that I can't find her. I tell you again the skipper and the doctor took her away while we were all drunk. Why don't you ask *them* ? Oh, go away ! go away ! Don't look at me like that !" and, with another agonized scream, he dragged the quilt over his face.

The paroxysm subsided, and for some minutes there was no further outbreak. Then with a wild yell he shouted, "It's not true that I carried her off. It was four years before I found out where she'd been, and then they told me she was dead, and the skipper and the doctor were dead, too, and you were dead, and presently I shall be dead, and then you won't be able to plague me any more. No, I didn't kill her. I tell you I didn't ! So go away !"

Another spell of muttering succeeded, then a fresh

outburst. "Yes, I did want your widow to marry me. I wanted to spite you, you tyrant, so you're welcome to that. Serves you right for getting me punished. Now be off! I'm as good a man as you. Why shouldn't I have a beautiful young wife? Oh, do go away!"

The doctor silently renewed the ice cloths, and for fully half an hour the quiet of the ward was undisturbed. Then came another frenzied exclamation: "Why will you torment me like this? Every night those eyes watch me. Oh, do take them away! I've told you it was the skipper and the doctor. We left them alive when we killed the rest, because we wanted the skipper to manage the ship for us and the doctor to cure the chaps who had been hurt in the fight. *She* was left, because I wanted to marry her, and her ayah was left to wait on her. I told her she was a widow; told her that I'd done for you. And then those two robbed me of her after all. Curse them! Well, they both got burned to death, and the nigger woman too, so that helped to square the account! Don't ask me any more silly questions, you've heard it all thousands of times."

Only once more, towards morning, did the guilty man appear to be visited by his ghostly questioner. "Yes," he cried, "it's quite true. I did try to shoot the child. It was her child. I'm sure it was. It was just like her. Why did I want to murder your innocent child, do you say? Why, because it *was* yours, of course! Why did you have me put in the cells, you brute, eh? One good turn deserves another. He! he!" Then peal after peal of maniac laughter, succeeded by complete exhaustion and syncope.

"Come away," said the doctor. "It has struck three, and you must get some more sleep; but first

join me in cocoa and bread and butter, which Ah Fang brought up before he turned in."

While they were taking the welcome refreshment, Ralph said, "My feeling is that no good purpose could possibly be served by repeating to anyone the terrible things we have heard. Especially is it undesirable—indeed it would be positively cruel—for Sir John Kynnersley or his daughter to be told a single word of this man's ravings. It would cause them acute distress."

"I entirely share your feeling," said Captain Brady.

"Of course," added the doctor, "I must tell Sir John who the man is, and as he will probably be perfectly conscious in a few hours' time, he will be able to answer questions and make a coherent statement. Now do lie down, both of you."

Ralph's watch ended when the Sister came on duty at six o'clock, and, desiring her to send for him at once if the bushranger recovered consciousness, he despatched a servant to call Carew, and then rousing Captain Brady, the three hurried away to enjoy a swim in the lake before breakfast. Prayers over, Ralph gave during the meal a carefully guarded version of the amazing discovery they had made of the identity of the injured bushranger. "Of course it will be obvious to you, Sir John, that the expedition which my father had arranged, and which was so strangely interrupted at the outset, is now quite unnecessary. The involuntary confession of this man proves that there must have been a mutiny on board the *Cygnets*: that the mutineers, in their own interest, spared the captain and the doctor, and that Mrs. Barton was also spared, and was subsequently taken out of the mutineers' hands by those two officers, who evidently lost their lives in

the bush fire from which she was saved. The complete disappearance of the vessel is still unexplained.

"The man is dying. His injuries are of a nature to preclude all chance of recovery. But it is almost certain that his mind will be perfectly clear for some time before death. I wish to know whether you would care to see him, if that period of consciousness should occur. Such an interview must be very painful, but it is for you to decide."

Ralph's story produced a profound sensation, and when, after a few moments, the General mastered his emotion, his reply was emphatic. "I will most certainly see this man. Not only shall I be naturally anxious to gain any further light which his statements may afford, but I cannot forget that he is a dying sinner, and I would wish, as a Christian man, to tell him that for Christ's sake I freely forgive him, in so far as he has sinned against me and mine."

Enid kissed her father, and whispered in his ear. He answered aloud, "Yes, my love, if you wish it, and Ralph sees no objection."

"On the contrary," said Ralph with a smile—"for I infer she wishes to accompany you—I was hoping she would do so, but didn't feel free to suggest it. As I intimated before, the interview is likely to be distressing."

"By the way, father, Captain Brady tells me you are lending him the steamer. What time are you proposing to start, Captain?"

"I should like to telephone to Adelaide again; but, barring any hitch in the arrangement concluded last night, I think it would be well if we got away from the wharf about three o'clock. That will enable me to be present if your patient revives sufficiently to make

any statement this morning. We have exactly two days' steaming between here and Morgan, and I am timing the run so as to reach there in daylight."

"Very good," commented the doctor, "I was only anxious that you should attend in the ward by and by."

CHAPTER XXI.

"Bear through sorrow, wrong, and ruth,
In thy heart the dew of youth,
On thy lips the smile of truth.
Oh, that dew, like balm, shall steal
Into wounds that cannot heal,
Even as sleep our eyes doth seal ;
And that smile, like sunshine, dart
Into many a sunless heart,
For a smile of God thou art."

—Longfellow.

CONFESSION.

THE momentous meeting between the deserter, Edwards, and the three gentlemen who had been officers of his old regiment, took place sooner than anyone anticipated.

As he re-entered the infirmary, the doctor learned that there were signs of returning consciousness, and, hastily summoning Jenkins, he enquired, "Were you and Edwards in the habit of conversing in Welsh when you were thrown together ? "

"Yes, sir, that was quite the rule with us. We were the only Welshmen in the regiment, and we were glad of the chance of chatting in our native tongue, though we hadn't much in common."

"Then please go at once, seat yourself by the bedside, and address him in your own language directly he appears to be conscious. Your doing so will have the effect of immediately carrying Edwards' mind back to the circumstances and associations of twenty years ago. Besides, it will be well for you to explain to him briefly, not only how he comes to be in hospital, but also the capture of all his companions. Make him understand that the doctor pronounces his case quite hopeless.

Then tell him of all the information we gleaned, and the inferences we drew from his ravings during the night, also that Captain Barton was not killed as he supposed, and that he, Major Woodward and Captain Brady, all of whom he knew, are staying here, and are coming to see him ; *but don't mention Miss Enid !*"

Returning to the house, he explained to Sir John that by allowing Jenkins to talk familiarly to an old comrade in their native tongue he felt much valuable time would be saved, and probably far more of the deserter's story would be told than if they had depended upon formal interrogation by themselves. The General assured him that he had acted very wisely, as the plan would not only ensure Edwards speaking with greater freedom, but would entirely obviate the painful questioning to which he had been looking forward with trepidation.

The three brother officers, with Enid and Carew, accompanied the doctor to the infirmary, and while passing with hushed footfall into his room, they heard through the partially opened door of No. 1 ward the words "Private Edwards!"—followed by a sentence in Welsh. Then came a startled exclamation from the patient, followed by rapid utterances in which the word "Jenkins" alone was distinguishable. After that, a prolonged statement by the Corporal, punctuated by frequent interjections of astonishment from Edwards, was succeeded by a dialogue lasting fully ten minutes. Presently the Sister entered, asking for the doctor, and in a few moments he returned, saying there was now no need to make any enquiries, as everything had been fully explained, and, moreover, the dying man was probably too exhausted to be further questioned.

When Ralph conducted the party into the ward, the fever worn face on the pillow at once commanded pity. The eyes were closed, and the breathing was difficult and painful, but at a word from Jenkins the poor man looked up, and seeing Enid on her father's arm, exclaimed, " You told me the three officers were coming, you didn't say Mrs. Barton was alive ! She looks exactly as she did when she left India."

" My poor fellow," said the General, " this is not my wife whom you see, but my daughter. I don't wonder at your being deceived by the resemblance. I was myself, for until a few weeks ago I had never seen her, nor did I know that I had a child. All these years I have lived in the belief that my poor wife had perished at sea on the voyage to England. And now in the providence of God I have been recently brought to the very house where my child has found a home since she was rescued fifteen years ago."

" Oh, sir, you speak of ' the providence of God,' " faltered the sufferer. " Jenkins here used to talk to me about it when we were comrades, but I scoffed and went my own way. Ah, it was the wrong way, sir, and it has brought me to this. And now the doctor says I am dying ; but Jenkins has explained to me things I never knew or understood, and I should like, before I go, to tell you, sir, how bitterly sorry I am for all the cruel wrong I've done you, and all the wrong I'd meant to do if I hadn't been prevented. Aye ! I see now. It must have been God who prevented me. And you, too, Major, I've been told that it was you I shot that night in the hills, and that you had to leave the army through it. I'm very, very sorry, gentlemen, for all the terrible trouble my wickedness has brought upon you, and upon you, too, Miss, and now," he

groaned, " I am dying, and I'm going to hell ! There can be no pardon for me ! "

At this Enid slipped from her father's side, and, stooping over the dying man, took the fevered hand in her own and whispered, " You must not say that. There *is* pardon for you. My father and Major Woodward and I all forgive you freely, and the God against whom you have sinned says that ' he that confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall have mercy.' God knows everything, and I feel sure He sent you here that you might confess your sins and find mercy."

While Enid was speaking, the eyes of the dying bushranger rested with awe upon her sweet face, upon the eyes in which shone the light of a divine pity ; then muttering, " It must be an angel !" he passed into unconsciousness.

At a sign from the doctor, all but Jenkins and the nurse left the ward. Presently he rejoined them in his room, saying, " The effort was too much for him ; but it is most likely he will recover consciousness once more before death, and if Enid and Carew will wait here I should be glad for them to be with him. Indeed, you might join Sister now, Enid, if you like. Your presence would tend to soothe him."

" Thank you, dear, I shall be very glad." And the white clad figure passed swiftly from the room. Sir John and the Major followed, but turned in the opposite direction, the General murmuring, as he linked his arm in his friend's and strolled into the garden, " Every action reminds me of her mother, and she shows, too, the same tender sympathy and solicitude for those who suffer ; the same forgiving spirit. Ah, Woodward, what a tangle it has all been ! At the time you were shot, all of us realized that your rising at that precise

instant probably saved my life, just, indeed, as it also laid the foundation of all my fortunate career. But no one dreamed that that supposed chance shot of the enemy was deliberately aimed at my heart ! And now, to think that after a lapse of twenty years an apparently haphazard bushrangers' raid upon an Australian station should serve to solve more than one mystery, and that my would-be murderer should hear the message of forgiveness and peace from the lips of that precious child. What miserable stupidity it is to chatter about *luck* and *fate*. We, as Christians, must see the hand of our Father in heaven in all these remarkable happenings."

They found the five ladies and the Squatter sitting in the grateful shade of an arbour, and the group listened with sympathetic interest to their story, and were still discussing it when, as twelve strokes resounded from the clock-tower, Enid, Ralph, and Carew were seen coming slowly towards them across the lawn. The former, with a gesture, drew her father apart, and together they passed out of sight beyond the yew hedge."

" Yes," said Ralph, in response to a glance of enquiry from his mother, " he is dead. He was conscious for fully half an hour, while Carew read and prayed with him. Then Carew and I came away, as he seemed to wish to be alone with Enid. Sister tells me he uttered words of deep penitence and regret, and, at the last, as Enid had just told him the story of the repentent thief, and the Saviour's assurance to him, he turned to her, saying, 'Ah, lady, does He say those words to *me*?'"

There was a pause, during which the thoughts of all dwelt upon that deathbed scene. Then Mrs. Grant

looked up, saying, "And was that the end?"

"That was the end," said Ralph, as he turned and walked toward the house.

The silence which followed was broken by Captain Brady, who, mopping his eyes, exclaimed, "Sure, I'm thinking the poor fellow wasn't far wrong in mistaking her for an angel. I'm ashamed to confess that my sole thought for years has been to root out these bushranger pests and get them hanged, as though they were mere vermin, and now I'm reminded by that sweet child that Jim Brady stands in need of the Saviour just as much as the very worst of them"—and he, too, strode away.

* * * * *

Luncheon was served at half-past one, and Ralph seized the opportunity of mentioning the facts elicited by Jenkins as to Edwards' desertion. It appeared that as the *Cygnet* was short-handed, the chief officer had been glad to avail himself of the services of Edwards, Kavanagh, and several other men of doubtful character. The mutiny took place ten days after leaving Calcutta, and the captain was compelled to navigate the ship to the Australian coast. Mrs. Barton and her ayah were rescued and rowed ashore by the captain and doctor, while the vessel lay in one of the numerous wooded bays, and all hands were sleeping off the effects of a drunken orgy. Two days later, while the mutineers were celebrating Christmas Eve, a fire broke out in the spirit-room, and not only was the Indiaman completely destroyed, but the conflagration extended to the forest and originated the disastrous bush-fire which overtook the four fugitives.

"And," concluded Ralph, "that last fact would appear to settle, once for all, a point of extreme

importance, which has hitherto been shrouded in obscurity. Don't you agree with me, Enid?"

Instantly the girl's face lighted up with pleasure as she exclaimed, "Oh, how wonderful! Then I *was* born on Christmas Day." And, rising from her seat, she went to the Squatter, and, embracing him warmly, said, "You, dear daddy, how glad you must be that you fixed upon that day." Then, turning to Sir John with a tender caress, she murmured, "It fixes, too, the date of dear mother's death."

* * * * *

The thirteen prisoners had meanwhile been safely placed under armed guard on board the *Caledonia*, while the horses were in comfortable quarters on the barge; it was therefore agreed that the entire house party should ride down as escort to the District Inspector, for Mrs. Brady and Nora, at the earnest solicitation of their hostess, were to prolong their visit for at least another week.

As the cavalcade approached the river, Captain Brady drew Sir John aside and said in a low tone, "My dear Kynnersley, I'm fairly overpowered. My sergeant tells me that that blessed girl, not content with ministering to the dying, actually persuaded him to let her go in amongst the prisoners, where she told them how their dead comrade had confessed his sin and sought mercy, and pleaded with them to follow his example. The sergeant says he never heard such words in his life or saw a more touching scene, for not even that hardened brute Kavanagh had a rude word for her, and some of them wept like children."

"Yes, Brady, I knew of it. She asked my permission. She seems, as Carew was saying to us on Chritsmas Day, to understand more deeply and practically than many

of us that Christ came indeed to bring 'peace and goodwill.' That God has given me such a child is the crowning mercy of my life. Now goodbye, old friend."

Then, as every arrangement was complete, Captain Brady stepped on board: five minutes later his parting wave was seen as the steamer passed out of sight beyond the bend, carrying the bushrangers to their fate, and, finally, out of this story.

The return was not hastened, and as the heat was intense, the riders were glad to walk their horses slowly beneath the trees, instead of keeping to the road. But at the last, when in sight of the house, there was a sudden and simultaneous urging of the steeds, for, coming down the drive beyond the gates, the mail cart was espied. It was found to contain the English mail, in addition to the usual daily delivery, and for the next half-hour everyone was engrossed in the perusal of letters, Mrs. Brady and her daughter consoling themselves with the illustrated papers and English magazines.

Carew, seated on a deck chair in the garden, had just finished reading a long letter from his mother, when Major Woodward accosted him with the enquiry, "Shall I be *de trop*, or have you quite got through your correspondence?"

"Quite, thank you, pray sit down." And the young clergyman opened another deck chair and placed it opposite his own.

"I want," began the Major, "to speak to you upon a matter of considerable importance, involving the interests of many persons besides ourselves."

"Ah, is it some new situation arising out of the recent discoveries?"

"No, it has no connection whatever with Bannock-

burn. I have in my hand"—tapping a letter with a deep mourning border—"a letter from my aunt, Mrs. George Woodward, announcing my uncle's death. The dear old man passed away in his sleep, and her letter is written just after the funeral, as she was anxious that I should hear direct from herself, as well as from others outside the family."

"He was indeed a 'dear old man,' Major. I shall never forget his parting words to me in the vestry. He has gone where he longed to be. But it is sad for his widow, so accustomed, in her invalid state, to depend upon his loving care and solicitude."

"Yes, though she appears to be wonderfully sustained, and speaks thankfully of the rest and joy into which he has entered. But now, Carew, the mail for England goes out to-morrow, or rather we must post from here to-morrow, and I have several important letters to write, the nature of which will depend upon you."

"Upon me! How can that be?"

"It is not an abstruse problem," said the Major, smiling. "Besides my aunt's letter, I have communications from the Bishop, the churchwardens, and my solicitors. From these I learn that, with the Bishop's sanction, arrangements have been made with a retired clergyman of private means, residing at Cheltenham, to act as *locum tenens* pending a fresh appointment, but on every ground it is desirable that the matter should be settled without unnecessary delay."

"I see. And the Bishop is very thoughtfully consulting your wishes before making the appointment."

"My dear fellow, do you mean to say you didn't know that the living is in my gift?"

"I had no idea of it. I had no means of knowing, and it didn't concern me to enquire."

" Well, Carew, as a matter of fact it has concerned you for some time past, for my uncle, after your visit, expressed his earnest wish that you should succeed him, and as I entirely shared his views, I had no difficulty in acceding to his desire, and I assure you my promise was a great comfort to the old man. And now, will you allow me to inform the Bishop that I present you, and that you will be returning to England almost immediately ? "

As Carew sat silent, the Major hastily added, " I am very sorry to give you such short notice, but take time to consider my offer, and meet me here again in half an hour."

Gratefully agreeing to this suggestion, the young man spent the interval in his own room and then returned to the *rendezvous*. In answer to Major Woodward's look of enquiry, he said, " Yes, my mind is quite made up."

" Ah, then you accept. I am very thankful."

" One moment : I do accept, but—and this is why I took time for consideration and prayer—I can only do so on one condition."

" And what is your condition ? "

" It is this—that your gift of the living should be coupled with the gift of your daughter. Major Woodward, I love her ; I have loved her ever since my visit to you in Worcestershire."

" Does May know of this ? Have you spoken to her ? "

" Certainly not. I am in priest's orders, but I hold no benefice. At present I have not even the stipend of a curate, but am entirely dependent upon my mother, who has a life interest in the whole of my father's property. Therefore, as I had no means of

maintaining a wife, it would have been both foolish and wrong to say one word to Miss May. However, my acceptance of this living would place me in comfortable circumstances, so that the difficulty as to ways and means would no longer exist. But the very fact of your offer raises a fresh possibility with which I must reckon. Should May's love be denied to me, I could not face the prospect of daily contact with her and her family which my position as rector of the parish would involve, but should at once offer my services to the Church Missionary Society."

The Major listened patiently. Then, leaning across, he gripped Carew's hand, saying, "I'm glad you've told me all this. Let me say at once that I honour you for your feelings, and for the frankness with which you have expressed them. Now, I will go further, and say that you have my hearty consent to your speaking to May, and I am certain Mrs. Woodward would entirely agree with me."

"What is that, Marmaduke? What is it in which you are so sure I should agree with you?" laughed Mrs. Woodward. "Does Mr. Carew hesitate to accept the living lest the patron's wife should prove a thorn in the rector's side?"

"My dear Barbara, you startled us. No, the rascal is greedy. He considers the Rectory far too big for a bachelor, and asks the patron to provide a wife as well, and it was upon that point that you overheard me saying that you would agree with me."

"But, in what am I supposed to agree?" said Mrs. Woodward, with an admirable pretence of bewilderment. "Were you pledging me to your view that it is 'good for man to be alone?'"

"Ah, Barbara! Barbara!" cried the Major, drawing

his wife's face down to his own, and kissing her tenderly. " You know better than that." Then turning, he said, " Carew, since your acceptance of this living depends upon May's acceptance of *you*, be off with you at once and ask her : and my wife and I both wish you success, don't we, dear ? "

" Yes, indeed," said May's mother, sweetly, " I could wish for nothing better. You will find May in the morning-room. I left her for a few moments just to consult my husband upon one of my English letters, so mind you get through your business quickly, and let me come back to my writing," she added playfully.

The suitor obeyed her so very literally that the couple were still discussing the letter in question when he returned—and not alone—to seek the parental blessing.

" And now, my dear boy," said the Major, " I suppose I am at last at liberty to tell the Bishop and everyone else concerned that the vacancy is filled.

" You are entirely at liberty, sir, subject to May's permission to me to accept your offer."

" Oh come, come, this will never do. Where's the logic you learned at Cambridge ? You told me you could only accept the living if May accepted *you*. She *has* accepted you, therefore—Q.E.D., eh ? But you are quite right, my son, the happiest man is he who, throughout his married life, makes his wife his confidante, and I commend you for beginning thus early. Well May, my child, has your *fiancé* the desired permission ? "

" Why, of course, father ! I have just promised to marry him. You would hardly expect me to deprive him of the means of marrying ; besides," she added, archly, " if I marry the rector of our own parish I

sha'n't be going very far from home, shall I ? ”

“ No, my love, I can assure you that your mother and I have both grasped that pleasing fact. So now, run away and discuss parochial matters with the new rector to your heart's content ! ”

In the drawing-room, before dinner, the formal announcement was made, and very warm congratulations were offered both to the betrothed couple and the parents. When dessert was served, and the servants had left the dining-room, the Squatter said, “ Well, I suppose we shall have a double wedding on the seventeenth of April ? ”

“ Indeed you will not,” cried the Major, emphatically. “ I have been very pliant to-day, but on that point I am adamant. Upon every ground it will be better that the new rector shall be married in his own church, and the dear old Bishop would be sadly upset if he couldn't tie the knot for the girl he both christened and confirmed. Kynnersley has consented to Enid being married here ; but that is only natural, because all her friends are here. But with May and Carew it is different ; both his relatives and friends and her's are in England”—

“ Oh, *we* are not in England,” interjected the Squatter.

“ Don't interrupt me, Aleck. I'm coming to that if you'll have patience. Enid is to be married from the house which is the only home she has ever known, and as she, her husband and her father are going to England by the same vessel as ourselves, it is only necessary to add you and Lilian to the party in order to secure the presence of all May's relations, English and colonial, when she is married from her parents' house.”

“ Bravo ! ” cried the General. “ You will have to

agree to that, my dear Grant, it is a most admirable arrangement.

"Hoity, toity," said the Squatter. "Why I haven't been to England since I went to fetch my wife. How can I leave home?"

But everyone felt that his protest was very half-hearted, and when the ladies left the table it was generally understood that the Major's suggestion was accepted. That Ralph believed the point decided was made clear by his slipping away after the ladies and betaking himself to the telephone. Twenty minutes later he casually mentioned in the drawing-room that he had secured a cabin for his parents in addition to those previously booked by the mail-boat leaving Sydney on the twenty-fourth of April.

Thus were these momentous matters settled, and we need make no further reference to them, for so ultimately, they all fell out.

CHAPTER XXII.

" Oh ! the warm Australian day—
Golden fair !
Blue, stainless skies ! and over all
A drowsy stillness seems to fall,
A perfect hush is everywhere,
And the waveless charméd air
Is held in dreamy thrall."

—Robert Richardson.

WEDDING BELLS.

A GLORIOUS Australian dawn. What is there in nature to excel it ? Surely nothing can, for it is perfect. One may travel over four continents and yet in all one's wanderings see nothing more rapturously fair than the dawn of an Australian autumn day.

A soft haze hung over lake and gully, over woodland and mighty river ; and presently, when the sun leapt above the horizon in sudden dazzling splendour, the clinging vapours were torn aside and rolled upwards in strange fantastic whirling shapes, or in tumultuous masses of white and gleaming cloud, to be quickly dissolved in the heat and brightness of the upper air.

Simultaneously a gun boomed forth from the hill above the *Caledonia* wharf, followed at intervals by another and another, until twenty-one reports had echoed and reverberated through the glens and gullies and across the hills for many miles, while the *Murray* conveyed the sound east and west along its broad reaches, startling and perplexing myriads of wild creatures of feather and fur.

The human denizens of all that region were startled too ; but they were not puzzled by the unusual sound,

for all who heard realized instantly that the great day for which they had been waiting and preparing was indeed come, and that the guns were at once a salute to the Governor and a summons citing all within hearing to attend the greatest function that fair land had ever witnessed, for was not this the dawn of Enid's bridal day ?

Commencing on the stroke of six o'clock, the magnificent new peal of bells in the church tower rang out merrily for twenty minutes, then the chimes suddenly ceased, giving place to a single clear tenor bell calling worshippers from far and near. In buggies, on horseback and on foot they came. In all directions the paths were dotted with folk urging their way toward the house of God : for she whose simplest wish was law to those who loved her—which is equivalent to saying all who knew her—had asked that her wedding day might begin with the administration of the Lord's Supper, and that her friends would meet her there.

As the Bishop rose to read the opening words of the Communion Service the new church was filled in every part. And when, presently, the Governor of the Colony, legislators and leading public men, English and Colonials, Chinaman, black tracker and converted Hindoo drew near to partake of the memorials of His Cross and Passion, it was felt indeed how blessed and how real is the bond of Christian unity.

The Bishop was assisted by six other clergy, and as the congregation left the building there was but one generally-expressed feeling of thankfulness for such an auspicious opening of the eventful day.

Never before had the renowned hospitalities of Bannockburn been put to so severe a test ; but they stood the strain. Breakfast was provided at eight

o'clock for all comers, and fully five hundred persons, with healthy colonial appetites, found enough and to spare.

Breakfast over, the guests wandered at will through the extensive grounds or inspected the wedding gifts, for the effective display of which three rooms had been appropriated.

At half-past eleven the church began to fill. Punctually at noon the Bishop, clergy and choir met the bridal procession at the west door. Enid was escorted by her father, while Ralph, supported by Carew as best man, awaited her in the chancel. It was noticed that Sir John Kynnersley appeared for the first time since his arrival in his general's uniform, wearing his decorations, and that the Governor also wore uniform for the occasion. May Woodward, Nora Brady, Helen Tennant and Grace Melrose were the bridesmaids, and all looked charmingly fitted to attend so lovely a bride.

The Bishop's address to the newly-married pair was brief, but in quality it was pure gold. Indeed, its only fault in the estimation of his hearers was that very brevity into which he strove to condense it. Lightly touching upon the fact of his long and intimate acquaintance with both bride and groom, he proceeded to urge upon them in words of solemn earnestness to be lovers indeed, to exercise mutual forbearance, to be helpers one of another in joy and in adversity : above all things to remember the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ upon them, and so to order their lives that even in the brightest, happiest times they might each be able to say, " My Saviour is brighter and better to me than the very best this world can give."

The first entry in the new marriage register bore-

the signatures of several notable witnesses, and its possession would have gladdened the heart of many an autograph hunter.

While the organ pealed forth the wedding march, and the great bells overhead clanged a joyous greeting, white-frocked children scattered orange-blossoms in the bride's path as, smiling and radiant, she walked from the vestry upon her husband's arm, while from the porch to the lychgate the procession passed beneath a novel arch, formed by the crossed whips of a hundred bronzed and sturdy stockmen.

Then came a surprise, which explained Jacky's recent mysterious absence. As the bridal party emerged from the stockmen's arch and entered the avenue of plane trees, the air was suddenly filled with piercing cries and prolonged coo-ehs from native throats, as seventy painted and plumed warriors burst from their cover on either side and yelled vociferous plaudits to the graceful lady whom they had once known and nurtured as the "white girl piccaninny."

Each warrior boasted an unusually large opossum robe ; each carried spear, boomerang and shield ; while as they danced in unison, their necklets, bracelets, anklets and girdles of crisp dry eucalyptus leaves rattled with a noise like rushing water. But at a signal from our old acquaintance, the tall leader of fifteen years ago, now grown grey and wrinkled, the cries and dancing suddenly ceased, and a group of head-men came forward to tender the greetings of the tribe and present their marriage gift of two enormous opossum skin rugs. These being accepted and duly admired, were entrusted to Jacky for conveyance to the house, to be placed with the other wedding presents. The entire bridal party shook hands with the head men, Sir John Kynnersley

expressing, through Jacky, his grateful sense of all the tribe had done for his wife and subsequently for his little child, and intimating his desire that at some future time his gratitude should take practical shape.

Then the natives faced about and, forming two lines, headed the procession to the house, waving their feather-tufted spears and, with regular stamp, renewing the sound of rushing water caused by the rattling of nearly six hundred large bunches of leaves.

Subsequently the whole band was photographed, both separately and while standing in the rear of the bridal group, and special provision was made for feasting them upon the shore of the lake, where they were visited by the Governor, the Bishop, and many of the white guests, all of whom were interested in making the acquaintance of Enid's early protectors.

The newly-married couple held a reception on the lawn, and this was followed by a *déjeuner* served at three long tables in a large marquee by an army of waiters brought by special train and steamer from the capital, and eaten to an accompaniment of the strains of a military band.

By and by the Governor was observed to rise, and instantly the hum of conversation subsided.

" My lord Bishop, ladies and gentlemen," said he, " since I have had the honour to represent Her Majesty in this Colony, I have been present at many important gatherings, but I can truthfully say that not one of them has approached this function in the intensity of the appeal it has made to me.

" Even in the most ordinary circumstances, the marriage of a beautiful and accomplished woman to a husband in every way worthy of her is an event which enlists our warmest sympathy and felicitations.

But in the present case there are, both with regard to the bride and bridegroom, features of such special, I may say such dramatic, interest, that both our imagination and our heart have been gripped by them. To enter into the slightest detail is needless ; you are all as familiar as I with the bride's romantic story. I will only say this, that it appears to me but fitting that he who, as a boy of twelve, fired the shot which saved her life, and who has since by his skill saved the life of her honoured father, and so been the means of bringing parent and child together, should to-day have received at that father's hands the priceless reward of his heart's desire.

" But, ladies and gentlemen, although that gift is his greatest reward, it is not to be his only one on this auspicious day. Three months ago the bridegroom, by means of measures characterized in their inception by marvellous fertility of resource, and executed with a promptitude and a cool and intrepid daring beyond praise—through these measures he delivered this Colony and two sister Colonies from a very real and terrible menance.

" In the result, he was enabled to hand over to the Authorities a gang of notorious desperadoes, who were one and all guilty of heinous crimes, and had for years baffled and eluded all the resources of justice : and for that noble action I am glad to know the thanks of three Legislatures have been voted to him.

" How, incidentally, this capture led to the complete elucidation of mysterious events of deep and affecting interest to my dear old friend Sir John Kynnersley and his daughter, is now matter of common knowledge, and must be regarded as a most singular and striking instance of the workings of Divine Providence.

" But I have more to say. My Royal Mistress, ever deeply interested in all that concerns her subjects, has bidden me place this rope of pearls (as I now do before you all) around the neck of the bride, and assure her that she, the Queen, hopes to become personally acquainted with the daughter of one of her bravest and most trusted soldiers.

" Nor is that all. I am commanded, on behalf of Her Majesty, to confer the honour of knighthood upon the bridegroom, in expression of her high appreciation of the distinguished service he has rendered to the State.

" And now, ladies and gentlemen, it only remains for me to propose the health of our very dear friends, Sir Ralph and Lady Grant, and may God bless them with long life and every happiness ! "

The Governor's speech had been punctuated by cheers expressive of the hearty endorsement by his hearers of the statements so tersely yet warmly expressed, and when the vociferous applause which greeted his closing announcement had subsided, and Ralph had replied on behalf of his wife and himself, the Bishop rose and said—

" Your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen. I will not inflict a speech upon you. Everyone who has visited Bannockburn must have been familiar with one whose sturdy simple christianity and shrewd common sense have been at once example and assistance to many, certainly to myself. I refer, of course, to the late Angus Ferguson. It is within my knowledge that the bride of to-day, Lady Grant, during the whole fifteen years of her residence here, was always upon her birthday the recipient of a poetic greeting from him, and we can well imagine how hearty would have been the verses composed by him had he lived to see this

day. Not for a moment do I lay claim to his natural gift, but I have ventured to pen the lines which I will now read, as an expression of our united wish for the bride :—

Enid ! on thy marriage morning,
With the happy years behind thee,
And the future bright before thee,
Take from us our hearts' good wishes,
Prayerful wishes for thy welfare.
Clouds will sometimes darkly gather,
Danger will at times beset thee,
But in all things may the presence
Of the unseen Lord be with thee,
Change thy night to radiant noonday,
Keep thee calm and trustful ever,
Make thee strong, enduring, patient,
Make thee wise and sympathetic,
That of those who cross thy pathway
All may have a clearer vision
Of a noble life and holy ;
Those whose faith is weak—be strengthened,
Those who shrink from duty's summons
Helped to nerve their weak endeavour—
Loved by all, to all a blessing,
Enid, thus shall joy attend thee.”

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

The following official information is furnished by the Agent General, for the benefit of the intending tourist or settler.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA—THE CENTRAL STATE.

The palatial mail steamers which supply a weekly service between Australia and England land mails and passengers for Eastern Australia and New Zealand at South Australia's chief port, and embark mails and passengers on the return voyage. A commodious "Outer Harbour" has been constructed for the accommodation of ocean-going vessels, and passengers are able to step from the deck of their steamer into a train which will land them in Adelaide in twenty minutes.

Through passengers to and from the Eastern States are thus provided with every opportunity for breaking their journey and spending a few days, or weeks, in visiting rural South Australia, and the numerous beauty spots and pleasure resorts which the State supplies. All the big liners trading to the Commonwealth call at South Australia, so that the immigrant or the tourist has a variety of fares from which to make a choice. The voyage may be made *via* the Suez Canal or the Cape of Good Hope, and the alternative offers a remarkable contrast to the experiences which early settlers were compelled to undergo. The journey may now be accomplished in a few weeks, with a minimum of risk and a maximum of comfort and enjoyment, in steamers which are scheduled to time with the certainty of railway trains.

The tourist from the deck of a steamer coming up St. Vincent's Gulf cannot but admire the magnificent panorama of landscape spread out before him. A high range of hills, running north and south, shuts off the eastern view and concentrates the vision on the plains, situated on which, close to the foothills, is Adelaide, the capital of the State. The country is open and undulating, rising in easy gradients from the seashore to the mountains. Cultivated fields give the country a chess-board appearance, vineyards alternating with cereal and irrigated fodder crops; grass meadows contrasting with the chocolate colour of the fallow land. The tourist receives a favourable impression as he approaches the harbour, and cannot fail to come to the conclusion that the lowlands and the highlands near Adelaide will repay closer inspection.

Mark Twain, in "More Tramps Abroad," says:—
"Approaching Adelaide from Melbourne, we left the train and were driven in an open carriage over the hills and along their slopes to the city. It was an excursion of an hour or two, and the charm of it could not be overstated. The road wound around through gaps and gorges and offered all varieties of scenery and prospect—mountains, crags, country houses, gardens, forests—colour, colour, colour everywhere, and the air fine and fresh, the skies blue, and not a shred of cloud to mar the downpour of the brilliant sunshine. And finally the mountain gateway opened, and the immense plain lay spread out below and stretching away into dim distances on every hand, soft and delicate, and dainty and beautiful. On its near edge reposed the city; with wide streets, compactly built; with fine homes everywhere, embowered in foliage and flowers; and with imposing masses of public buildings nobly grouped and architecturally beautiful."

The climate in South Australia is one of the best in the world. There is to be found the maximum of genial sunshine. Nature smiles on the healthy man, and he experiences the full joy of living.

A Charming Climate.

Sunless days are rare. Winter has no terror for man or beast. It neither depresses nor destroys. It invigorates and cheers.

The mean temperature of the three winter months is—June, 53.5 ; July, 51.5 ; August, 54.0.

The healthiness of the climate is indicated by the low death rate, which in 1907 was 9.72 per 1,000 of the population, as compared with 15.5 in the United Kingdom, 19.6 in France, 19.6 in the German Empire, 21.7 in Italy, 23.7 in Austria, 25.9 in Spain, and 27.8 in Hungary, for the year preceding.

The system of drainage in Adelaide is a model for the Commonwealth. Even after heavy rains little concentration of water is to be seen. It is facilitated by the contour of the roads. It is carried away to the river by a huge network of gutters and channels. The city of Adelaide is one of the best drained and one of the cleanest in the world.

Infant life thrives in South Australia. The death rate of infants in 1906 was 7.58 per cent. of births registered, as compared with 13.78 in England as the mean of the five years ended 1905.

The glorious natural conditions of climate are aided by intelligent methods of hygiene. Epidemics of serious sickness are rare, because they are watched for and dealt with at the outset.

The Rev. E. G. Gange, F.R.A.S., who visited Australia in 1907, wrote on his return :—"Adelaide, the capital of South Australia, is surrounded by a belt of park lands, so that children, invalids, or athletes have not to trudge long distances to find an open space ; but, striking out from centre to circumference in any direction, this zone of health is quickly found, with its carpet of grass and canopy of trees, where men can rest or indulge in athletic sports without let or hindrance."

So equable is the climate that it is never necessary to house and artificially feed live stock. The most valuable stud animals graze in open paddocks from January to December. The fact that medical experts all over the Commonwealth regard South Australia

as a sanatorium, and send patients to it to recuperate, is a sufficient testimony to the bracing qualities of the atmosphere.

The State offers ideal homes for retired Indian officers and persons who desire to lead a peaceful rural life, breathing the fresh air of the country under the shade of their own vines and fig trees. The national standard of education is high, so that in city, town, and country there is no lack of intellectual culture or opportunity of bringing up families. Life is free and attractive, and the cost of living comparatively low.

South Australia has been described as a "garden" State. A recent English visitor *A "Garden" State.* declared—"South Australia is a fine country. Its area is vast, its resources are numerous, and its people capable."

An important factor for the worker is that there are no long periods of enforced idleness on account of climatic conditions. Snow does not lie on the ground for weeks at a time: for a snowfall in the ranges once in a few years causes the greatest excitement, and a stampede of citizens takes place to view the strange sight. The farmer can get upon the land and do something at every period of the year, while the horticulturist and the stockowner can profitably utilise all their time. That in itself is an important asset. There cannot be anything wrong with either the soil or the climate of a country in which the same field may be seen growing in their season apples, oranges, pears, cherries, olives, grapes—the fruits of all Europe thriving luxuriantly in the one State. In the next field may be grazing cattle, sheep and horses that are not to be excelled in any part of the world.

Natural conditions favour the primary producer. Cheap land, good soil, favourable climate, increasing transport facilities, improved methods of culture, all combine to reduce cost of production to a minimum. The pastoral, agricultural, and dairying industries are all expanding, and there is a steady growth of manufactures and mining.

The land laws of the State are on a liberal basis, and elasticity and sympathy characterise *Land*. Their administration. There is a genuine desire to encourage settlement, and in no other State in the Commonwealth is the outlook brighter for the producer possessed of brains and moderate capital. Homesseekers will find the State a liberal landlord.

Crown lands are continually being surveyed and offered to the public under agreement with covenant to purchase and perpetual lease. Much of this land, although not of first-class quality, is suitable for wheat-growing with the aid of superphosphates and the improved methods of cultivation. There are now about 1,290,000 acres of Crown land open to application.

Areas suitable for farms may be taken up of sizes varying according to the quality, of the value of £5,000, or of pasture land only, for 5,000 sheep, or in dry areas 10,000 sheep. These lands may be held either on perpetual lease or on agreement to purchase. In the latter case the payments, made half-yearly, after deducting interest, go towards purchase-money, and on 60 such payments being made the purchase is complete.

If taken on perpetual lease the annual rental will be according to the value of the land, from about $\frac{1}{4}$ d. to about 1s. per acre, according to quality. If on agreement to purchase the price will be from 2s. 6d. to about £1 per acre.

Homestead blocks up to £100 worth may be taken on perpetual lease or agreement to purchase. These are meant for workmen's homes, not to make a living on, but to devote their spare time upon while not employed elsewhere.

The Land Board, composed of three members, arranges the subdivision of lands.

As soon as surveys are completed the board fixes the price at which each block is to be offered, and, when approved by the Commissioner, full particulars of area, &c., are published.

Advances up to £50 may be made to homestead blockholders to assist in erection of buildings and other improvements.

Advances up to £75 may also be made to lessees of reclaimed lands for the purpose of effecting improvements on their holdings.

Vermin-proof wire netting is advanced to landholders on easy terms, repayable in annual instalments.

The cost of preparing land, sowing, and harvesting a wheat crop varies, according to methods adopted and the districts, from about 15s. to 30s. per acre; 25s. an acre is considered a fair average cost, including seed and all expenses excepting manure.

Phosphate is the fertiliser used for wheat crops. In South Australia there are immense deposits of this, many of which are being worked and treated; large quantities are also being imported. The quantity placed on the land varies from 70lbs. per acre in dry districts to 140lbs. where there is a good rainfall. The cost is from 4s. 6d. to 5s. 6d. per hundredweight, according to quality.

South Australia has more than 6,000,000 sheep and produces about 50,000,000lbs. weight of wool annually, and there are still very large areas available for pastoral occupation. Of the cultivated area of the State about one-half is devoted to wheat growing, and the harvest just concluded realised 25,000,000 bushels. The Government is throwing open large areas of new country suitable for wheat growing and is building new railways to open up these districts.

Dairying is an important industry, and with the facilities offered by the Government for the transport, manufacture and export of butter, together with the increasing demand in Great Britain for South Australian butter, offers good prospects to those taking up the industry.

Fruit growing, viticulture, poultry farming, are all great industries which can be conducted with excellent prospects of success. The following figures will show how important the dairying, fruit growing and other industries are:—

Yearly production of—
 Wine, 3,132,247 gallons.
 Currants, 24,449 cwts.
 Apples (dried), 2,215 cwts.
 Oranges, 176,732 bushels.
 Apricots, 113,356 bushels.
 Peaches, 59,616 bushels.
 Butter, 8,130,560 lbs.
 Honey, 1,007,717 lbs.
 Olive Oil, 12,998 gallons.

Raisins, 28,007 cwts.
 Apples, 398, 812 bushels.
 Pears, 74,728 bushels.
 Almonds, 6,453 cwts.
 Apricots (dried), 2,909 cwts.
 Peaches (dried), 1,110 cwts.
 Cheese, 1,556,894 lbs.
 Bacon and Ham, 3,392,182
 lbs.

An Act was passed during the 1908 Session of Parliament authorising the Government *Advances to Settlers.* to make advances to holders of a lease of or an agreement to purchase Crown Lands in South Australia. In 1911, irrigation and repurchased lands were included. Payments are now being made under the following regulations :—

All particulars and forms of application can be obtained from the chairman of the Advances to Settlers Board (which comprises the Surveyor-General, Deputy Surveyor-General, and the Land Board), Surveyor-General's Office, Adelaide.

Advances are made for—

- (1) Ringbarking, clearing (including rolling down or burning), grubbing, fencing, draining, erecting or making permanent water improvements, boring for water, or erecting permanent buildings ; or
- (2) Purchase of stock ; for stocking the holding of the applicant ; or
- (3) Discharging any mortgage already existing on holding, on the security of—
 - (a) Leases of Crown lands ;
 - (b) Agreements with covenant to purchase Crown lands ;
 - (c) Leases or agreements of repurchased lands ; or
 - (d) Leases of irrigation and reclaimed lands, and such other security as the Board may desire.

Advances may be made by instalments, if necessary, at the discretion of the Board, of amounts not exceeding in the aggregate £850 to any one settler, for making improvements, the purchase of stock, and discharge of mortgage. The first £400 will be advanced on the fair estimated aggregate value of the settler's lease or agreement, and any improvements already made on the holding, and those in course of being made thereon. Any loan beyond £400 would not exceed 15s. in the pound of the fair estimated value of the improvements already made. Advances to holders of reclaimed lands under both the Advances to Settlers Acts and the Irrigation and Reclaimed Lands Acts do not in the aggregate exceed £600.

No advance shall be made to discharge an existing mortgage to an amount exceeding 15s. in the pound of the fair estimated value of the lease or agreement and improvements already made on the holding. Advances made for the purchase of stock are limited to a total of £200.

Applications may be for sums of £50, or any multiple thereof, not exceeding £850. Each application must be accompanied by a valuation fee of £1 for the first £100 and 10s. for each additional £50 or fraction of £50 applied for. No refund of fee is allowed if an inspection of the security has been made.

Mortgages are prepared free of charge, but borrowers are required to pay the statutory charges in connection with their registration, transfer, or discharge. These are—

- (a) Registration of mortgage, 10s.
- (b) Registration of transfer or discharge of mortgage, 5s.

The leases or agreements, as the case may be, together with the above fees, must be in the possession of the Board before a mortgage can be prepared, or fees can, at the option of the Board, be added to the mortgage debt.

Repayments of loans extend over a period of 30 years. Interest at a rate fixed annually is payable half-yearly. During the first five years interest only will be payable,

and during the remainder of the term the advance shall be repaid by equal half-yearly instalments, together with simple interest on the balance of advance, but when any half-yearly payment is made within 14 days of the due date a rebate of interest at the rate of £1 per centum per annum will be allowed. Any advance may be repaid earlier or in larger instalments than stated above.

Any breach by the settler of any terms of the mortgage renders the holding liable to cancellation, or the land may be sold if any payment is three months in arrear. The settler is required to keep in good tenantable repair all buildings and other improvements on the land, or the Board may effect repairs at the cost of the settler. Inspectors may view and report on improvements.

Full information respecting South Australia can be obtained at the Offices of the South Australian Government, 85 Gracechurch Street, London, E.C.



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